

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound



THE OTHER SIDE OF

# ORSON WELLES

CENTENARY SPECIAL

PLUS

- ASIF KAPADIA ON AMY WINEHOUSE ● CANNES 2015 ● 'THE LOOK OF SILENCE'
- THE S&S INTERVIEW: JOHN BOORMAN ● MARILYN MONROE'S SWANSONG 'THE MISFITS'

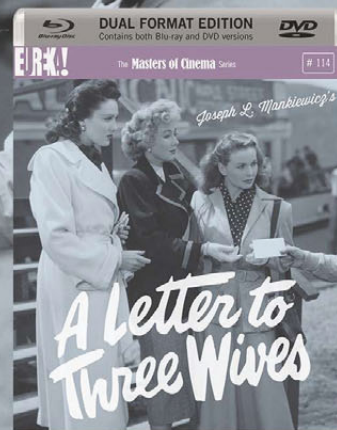
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# A Letter to Three Wives

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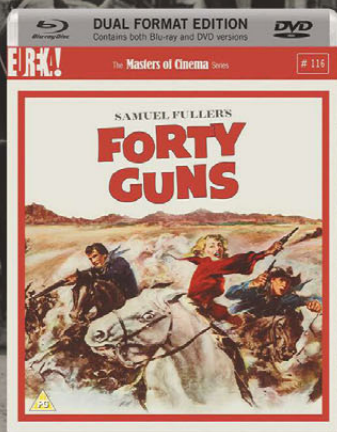
Written and directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz (the director of *All About Eve*) who won the Oscars for Best Director and Best Screenplay for his work on the film



Described by Martin Scorsese as "pure emotion", *Forty Guns* is one of the most dynamic cult Westerns of the fifties. Available for the first time on Blu-ray in a Dual Format edition this June.

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## Anatomy of Hell

John Huston's *The Misfits* shows the essential incompatibility of two people striving to be together when what they really want is to be alone. By **Peter Tonguette**

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##### Rare genius: the other side of Orson Welles

With all that has been written about Welles – born 100 years ago – it might feel as if there's nothing new to say. But the restless polymath left such a vast body of work it's still possible to find underappreciated gems – from his first professional film outing, *Too Much Johnson*, to a 1950s TV travelogue series to his late unfinished opus *The Other Side of the Wind*. By **Ben Walters**

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# MR BONGO: CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF ORSON WELLES

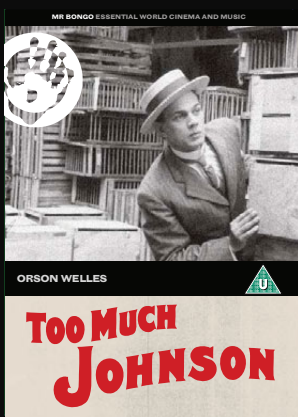


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## Welles first feature

### Too Much Johnson

(The Eastman House Restoration)  
DVD, Blu-ray

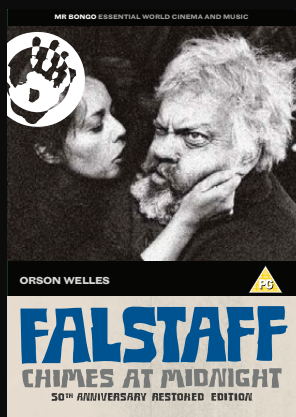


"A gleeful experiment in  
silent cinema pastiche"  
**The Guardian**

## Welles favourite film

### Falstaff: Chimes At Midnight

(The Filmoteca Restored Edition)  
DVD, Blu-ray

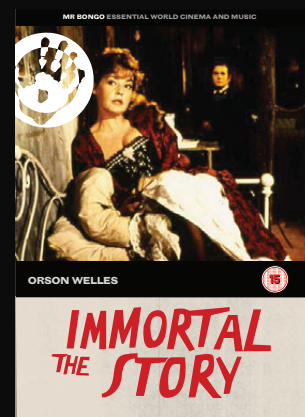


"My greatest ever film"  
**Orson Welles**

## Welles first colour feature

### The Immortal Story

DVD



"A sumptuous experience... Superb"  
**Time Out**

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**COVER**

Orson Welles © Getty Images  
Type design by André Beato  
Image retouched by DawkinsColour

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on sale 7 July

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# Editorial Nick James



## MEDIUM RAW

How many different cases of mourning can you get into a film festival? One might have thought the Cannes Competition this year was designed to meet that grim challenge. More than a third of the films in Palme d'or contention were substantially about grieving: as they kept coming, one began to worry about the emotional state of the selection panel. And since the quality of the films was so bizarrely uneven, meditations on death seemed like the only glue that held it all together.

If you think I'm exaggerating, look at this list of protagonists (spoiler alert): one grieves for her dying mother while trying to direct a feature film (*My Mother*); another mourns the son he unexpectedly finds amid a pile of gassed bodies at Auschwitz (*Son of Saul*); another the wife he didn't get along with who suddenly got a brain tumour (*The Sea of Trees*); a couple mourn the suicidal son who's posthumously bullied them both into a Death Valley trip (*Valley of Love*); a man mourns a wife, victim of a car crash, who has left him to raise troubled young brothers (*Louder Than Bombs*); another the terminally ill son on whom he pulled the plug against his wife and daughter's wishes (*Chronic*). A funereal pall also hovered over *The Lobster* – in which the rebels in the woods are required to dig their own graves – and *Macbeth* (obviously); and a funeral scene is also central to *Our Little Sister*, and the acceptance of life's end is the theme of *Youth*.

We must assume this is either a multiple coincidence or a sign that too many influential people in the film industry have reached the age when grief weighs heaviest. But it is none the less a curious matter. Mourning is one of the most difficult emotions to make a cinema audience identify with, because we rarely spend much of the film in the company of the deceased. If we do identify with the mourner, it is more likely to be for other reasons, not from any understanding we've gleaned of who or what they have lost. In a way, a mourning film asks us to feel emotions that are doubly vicarious – the usual process of identification with a protagonist complicated by the need to imagine, on scant evidence, their projections of another.

But let us suppose, for the sake of it, that this griefathon in cinema's most prestigious setting wasn't coincidence but the zeitgeist working. Where, then, would we look for the cause?

While the festival was in full swing, it emerged that the *New York Times* has changed its review policy. That

*More than a third of the films in Competition were substantially about grieving: as they kept coming, one began to worry about the emotional state of the selection panel*



august organ will no longer guarantee distributors that it will review every film that's screened in New York each week, "because of the increasing volume of films released each year". This was not so much a surprise as a benchmark. The film release market in both the US and the UK is being flooded with more new titles than any publication can keep up with. With anything up to 26 films being released a week, *Sight & Sound*, like the *New York Times*, now has to decide case by case what to review. Too many films are being shown briefly on a big screen solely to fulfil contractual commitments or because they're self-funded 'vanity projects'.

The flood is a symptom of the convergence of the moving image arts on digital platforms, and of increasing competition for our inundated time. Nobody knows if the collective experience of sitting in a movie theatre has a long-term future outside the blockbuster market. In an arthouse context, too many titles means thinner profits for everyone. London exhibitors seem to be dealing with this by charging higher prices and creating a more classy environment – not unlike the theatre, the ballet or the opera. But this excludes youth and denies cinema its former place as the most popular of the arts.

Everyone in the industry knows we'll eventually reach some kind of precipice, after which all bets are off. Perhaps it's no wonder, then, that grief should be in the air in that temple of great cinema, the Grand Théâtre Lumière. What is under threat is not the art of cinema itself – that has proved more durable than Susan Sontag's 1996 lament 'The Decay of Cinema' would have had us believe. It's rather cinema's *special status* among the moving image arts that's gradually withering away. And maybe, subconsciously, that's what was anticipated in the Competition films of Cannes 2015.



IN THE FRAME

## CANNON FODDER



Shooting from the hip: Menahem Golan (left) and Yoram Globus

In the 80s, Cannon Films, with its kooky mix of schlock and arthouse, dominated British film. We didn't know how lucky we were

By Michael Brooke

Fans of Mark Hartley's rollicking documentaries *Not Quite Hollywood* (2008) and *Machete Maidens Unleashed!* (2010) – about, respectively, Australian and Filipino exploitation cinema – will no doubt be delighted to hear that his latest, *Electric Boogaloo: The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Films*, serves up a very similar blend of engagingly sceptical talking heads and often jaw-dropping clips.

The crucial difference for Britons who came of age cinematically in the 1980s is that instead of a voyage into largely unknown territory, *Electric Boogaloo* offers a whistle-stop nostalgia trip through the triumphs and travails of a company that at the time was impossible to ignore. Video shop shelves were groaning with Cannon product, and you'd have to be pursuing an active boycott of the company to avoid Cannon cinemas, since by 1986 they'd taken over the Classic, Star and ABC chains as well as Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment and Elstree Studios, making them the most powerful British film industry players since the days of J. Arthur Rank. They were also the most personally flamboyant: Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus were all over the media, often accompanied by bouquets from the likes of Michael Winner (a regular Cannon employee) and brickbats from the far more pessimistic David Puttnam and Alexander Walker.

As for their films, they ran the gamut from schlock to art – although their Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone vehicles had bigger budgets and more marketing muscle, they also produced memorably uncompromising work by John Cassavetes (*Love Streams*, 1984), Donald Cammell (*White of the Eye*, 1986) and even Jean-Luc Godard (*King Lear*, 1987). In this respect, Cannon went further than Roger Corman's New World Pictures in the 1970s, which bought US distribution rights to Bergman and Fellini films but fought shy of directly producing their work. Even the most cynical commentators stress the advantages of Golan (like Corman) being a filmmaker himself, with direct personal experience of making films

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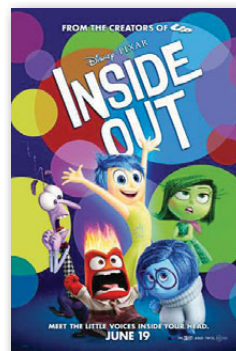
### Nicolas Roeg: It's About Time

The 86-year-old director (right) rarely gives interviews, but in this intimate Arena documentary (set for transmission on BBC4 on 28 June) he reflects on his career, with contributions from Donald Sutherland, Julie Christie, Bernard Rose and Danny Boyle.



### Edinburgh International Film Festival

New artistic director Mark Adams launches the festival's 69th edition (17-28 June) with a line-up celebrating both Hollywood – 'Inside Out', Pixar's latest, which is set inside the mind of a young girl – and Scottish cinema: Scott Graham's 'Iona', his follow-up to 'Shell', closes the festival. Those films keep good company with Sundance darlings 'Diary of a Teenage Girl' and 'Dope', as well as Andrew Haigh's '45 Years', which earned its leads Charlotte Rampling and Tom Courtenay acting prizes at this year's Berlinale.







It's a man's world: the poster for *Masters of the Universe* (1987), starring Dolph Lundgren as He-Man

against seemingly impossible budgetary odds (Hartley offers a rollercoaster tour of Golan's apprenticeship in commercial Israeli cinema in the 1960s and 70s). As a mogul, he was certainly a *monstre sacré* (and was well aware that this image generated terrific copy), but Hartley has amassed plenty of heavyweight testimonials from people such as Franco Zeffirelli, who made *Otello* for Cannon in 1985 and still claims it was his happiest filmmaking experience.

Hartley makes it clear that the generic mash-up was both the secret of Cannon's early success and the reason for the critical derision the films often attracted – especially when they reached the giddy heights of *Ninja III: The Domination* (1984), a dementedly Frankensteinian patchwork about a ninja-possessed female aerobics instructor, which was a shameless attempt at luring fans of both their earlier ninja films and the more teen/dance-oriented *Breakdance* films. The result in this case was wildly entertaining, but more for connoisseurs of bizarre film hybrids than typical multiplex patrons.

This mash-up method also extended to Cannon's more prestigious projects – Andrei Konchalovsky's *Runaway Train* (1985) incorporates script material from Akira Kurosawa and ex-con turned novelist Edward Bunker (later *Reservoir Dogs*' Mr Blue), was directed

by a friend and former colleague of Andrei Tarkovsky, and quotes both Shakespeare and Vivaldi during the ambiguous climax, while still amply delivering on Cannon's core requirement of a relentlessly violent 150mph thrill-ride.

But Cannon was itself trapped on a metaphorical runaway train, producing films in groups of 40 or 50 while pre-selling the next batch and crossing their fingers that one title – *The Delta Force* (1986)? *Over the Top* (1986)? *Masters of the Universe* (1987)? *Superman IV* (1987) – would be the blockbuster that would finally wipe out their ever-increasing debts. But their dizzying rise was followed by an even more precipitate fall, and by the early 1990s it was largely over. As one of Hartley's interviewees acknowledges, "There weren't many grievances at the end of the day" – but three decades on, their lows are mostly forgotten and the highs remain oddly memorable, sometimes because of their manifest flaws. It was seat-of-the-pants filmmaking, often cash-strapped and with premises so absurd it's amazing that some films got past the initial pitch (Golan's famous gut-instinct approach to decision-making helped here), but it's hard not to look back on their legacy with considerable affection. Frankly, we need more mad buccaneers in this business. **S**

**i** *Electric Boogaloo* is on release now and is reviewed on page 73

## LISTOMANIA BRITISH GANGSTER FILMS

As *The Long Good Friday* (below) returns to the big screen on 19 June, we survey the best British films about criminal underworlds.

- 1 **Brighton Rock** (1947)  
John Boulting
- 2 **They Made Me a Fugitive** (1947)  
Alberto Cavalcanti
- 3 **The Ladykillers** (1955)  
Alexander Mackendrick
- 4 **The Criminal** (1960)  
Joseph Losey
- 5 **Performance** (1970)  
Nicolas Roeg, Donald Cammell
- 6 **Get Carter** (1971)  
Mike Hodges
- 7 **Villain** (1971)  
Michael Tuchner
- 8 **The Hit** (1984)  
Stephen Frears
- 9 **Sexy Beast** (2000)  
Jonathan Glazer
- 10 **Down Terrace** (2009)  
Ben Wheatley



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH JOHN HUSTON

'If you make movies about movies and characters instead of people, the echoes get thinner and thinner until they're reduced to mechanical sounds'

John Huston's *The Misfits* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 12 June



## BFM International Film Festival

Britain's longest-running black independent film festival returns from 2-5 July at the Bernie Grant Arts Centre in Haringey, London. An impressive array of shorts and features opens with Menelik Shabazz's doc 'Looking for Love' (right), an exploration of relationships between British black men and women.



## 10 Greatest Documentaries of All Time

Last year, Sight & Sound's Documentary Poll saw Dziga Vertov's 1929 masterwork 'Man with a Movie Camera' (right) emerge as the greatest nonfiction film of all time, a long way from the dismissive reception it first received more than 80 years ago. A season of the top ten films in the poll, including Claude Lanzmann's 'Shoah' (1985) and Agnès Varda's 'The Gleaners and I' (2000), will screen at BFI Southbank, London, in July and August.





# VOTES OF CONFIDENCE



Never mind the ballots: Madonna as Eva Perón in Alan Parker's *Evita*

While the ballot box can serve as a shining symbol of democracy, hints of corruption and cynical manipulation are never far away



**By Hannah McGill**

From the commencement of a vote to the end of its count, ballot boxes are charged with as much mystery as the

theoretical container in which Schrödinger's cat either thrives or doesn't. In a culture in which so much that is most onerous and significant in our lives, from banking to break-ups to job interviews, can be executed in the digital realm, the tangibility of these boxes adds to their mystique. There's something at once preposterous and impressive about the fact that their secrets are shielded from us not by passwords and encryption, but by mere behavioural convention and layers of matter.

The physicality of the ballot box also engenders increasing fears about its corruptibility. If it was once online material that struck us as frail and falsifiable, a shift has occurred whereby it's now information on paper that appears alarmingly easy to copy, alter, destroy... or just ignore. "How hard is it to punch a paper ballot?" asks Democrat lawyer Ron Klain (Kevin Spacey) in HBO's 2008 film *Recount*, which covers the contested 2000 US presidential election result in Florida. All the harder, Klain will realise, when the ballot paper design is confusing, and all the more frustrating when the counting process is flawed. Later, he will admit to Al Gore with appropriate bemusement the failure of what sounds as if it should have been a simple matter: "I'm sorry,

sir, I just couldn't get them counted." The film ends on a shot of a warehouse full of stacked ballot papers: individual votes, many of which languish unregistered. Unresolved as the Florida issues finally were, electoral fraud has since been a commoner and sharper fear, with amateur video the favoured method for conspiracy theorists to spread their 'evidence'; the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum saw a rash of online postings appearing to show ballots being mishandled or disposed of.

The Hollywood mini-genre in which a flawed or innocent Everyman shakes up the complacent political sphere – *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941), *The Farmer's Daughter* (1946) – logically must venerate the process of voting as both sacrosanct and inherently empowering. As Gregory Vance, the alcoholic professor whose vote proves disproportionately important in Garson Kanin's *The Great Man Votes* (1939), John Barrymore celebrates the exercise of his democratic rights by quoting John Greenleaf Whittier's 1852 poem 'The Poor Voter on Election Day': "Today, of all the weary year/A king of men am I/Today



John Barrymore in *The Great Man Votes* (1939)



Babak Payami's *Secret Ballot* (2001)

alike are great and small/The nameless and the known/My palace is the people's hall/The ballot box my throne." But the sense that the ballot box automatically equalises, thanks to its levelling anonymity and the apparent simplicity of its process, is complicated in films that acknowledge the reluctance of the actual great and known to risk their palaces and thrones.

Babak Payami's *Secret Ballot* (2001) highlights not only the stubbornness and dedication required to establish participatory democracy – a determined returning officer (Nassim Abdi) carries a ballot box around a remote Iranian island persuading the occupants to vote – but also its limitations. There is scant connection between the lives of the islanders and the urban, educated conception of politics on offer; many don't understand what is being asked of them, see no sense in choosing one stranger over another, or are simply indifferent. "The idealisation of democracy is dangerous," Payami told the *Guardian* at the time of his film's release. "The illusion of democracy is likely to lead nowhere." If a populace is utterly disconnected from its rulers and decision-makers, its votes are at best



The Clangers in 'Vote for Froglet' (1974)





props in a performance, and at worst trumped-up evidence of legitimacy. The veneration of the ballot box in *Evita* (1996) has a similar ironic complexity. If Juan Perón (Jonathan Pryce) and his wife Eva (Madonna) have a vested interest in expanding the popular vote to peasants and women, and duly fetishise their own participation via photo opportunities, they have no intention of being limited by the demands of democracy. "There are other ways," notes the film's narrator, Che, "of establishing authority."

Five decades after the death of Eva Perón, Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis filmed auto workers

*If a populace is utterly disconnected from its rulers and decision-makers, its votes are at best props in a performance*

in Argentina as they sought to turn their factory into a workers' co-operative. "Our dreams do not fit in their ballot boxes," was the cry of some of the workers, to whom established democratic processes were a hindrance rather than a meaningful right (or rite). The slogan has since been taken up by other socialist movements.

It might also have chimed with the Clangers, the children's TV characters created by Oliver Postgate. The episode 'Vote for Froglet', broadcast on polling day 1974, saw their extraterrestrial community wholeheartedly reject the concept of voting. "They all went back down to their holes," Postgate later said of his creations, "and said 'Sod off! The whole thing is a waste of everybody's time!' I was trying to sell them the idea of politics, and they were determined not to have anything to do with it." The Clangers had spoken, and some of us might find ourselves sympathising: whatever was in the box, it was already dead. ☹

THE FIVE KEY...

# SHERLOCK HOLMESES

As Ian McKellen takes up the pipe and violin in Bill Condon's *Mr. Holmes*, we revisit the actors who have helped define a legend

By Robert Hanks

For more than a century filmmakers have adapted, extended, parodied and updated Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, filling in backstory and uncovering subtexts. Holmes has confronted Jack the Ripper, consulted Freud and confounded Hitler; we have had schoolboy Holmes, cocaine fiend Holmes, cartoon mouse Holmes, madman Holmes, fake Holmes and now, in Ian McKellen, old people's Holmes. It is surely significant that great stage actors (John Barrymore, Robert Stephens, Nicol Williamson) have been drawn to the role, offering varying degrees of theatricality, condescension and humour. And still it goes on: as Conan Doyle discovered when he tried to kill his creation off, there can never be a final problem.



**2 Basil Rathbone (1939-46)**  
Rathbone's 14 outings make him the most prolific cinema Holmes of the sound era. After his debut – a stagey but more or less straight *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – the war years saw him hunting spies and consolidating Anglo-American relations. Though hobbled by workaday scripts and Nigel Bruce's buffoonish Watson, his sardonic, decisive version defined the role for a generation.



**4 Jeremy Brett (1984-94)**  
For many, Brett's Granada TV version is incomparable – not because he matches Conan Doyle's conception (Douglas Wilmer got closer in the BBC versions of the mid-60s), but because this Holmes has a protean genius that encompasses every notion of the character: the sum of all Sherlocks. A functional, non-imbecile Watson (David Burke, then Edward Hardwicke) is a bonus.



**1 John Barrymore (1922)**  
If it's fidelity to Conan Doyle you're after, the 47 silents (1921-23) Eille Norwood starred in for the British studio Stoll Pictures may suit. The John Barrymore film *Sherlock Holmes* (from William Gillette's long-running play) plays fast and loose with the stories, adding slushy romance, but compensates with oodles of plot, a spider-like Moriarty, and a dashing, superior Sherlock.



**3 Robert Stephens (1970)**  
Even in the truncated version the studio put out, Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* stands out from the 1970s crop of revisionist Holmeses – superficially a spoof, it manages to be both tender and unsettling ("The most elegant picture I've ever shot," Wilder said, mourning the cuts). Stephens, nasal and campy, sneaks sex and an edge of tragedy into the humour.



**5 Benedict Cumberbatch (2010-)**  
The updating of the BBC TV versions, by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, is contrived, the plots messy and often ill thought through. But judging by the dense web of jokes and allusions, their affection for the canon is unfeigned; and Cumberbatch's sub-*Rain Man* Holmes, languid and lanky, and Martin Freeman's more earthbound Watson have a rare and believable chemistry.



# APOCALYPSE NOW

Thomas Cailley's *Les Combattants* is a crowdpleasing romcom filtered through the French auteur tradition – with unexpected results

By Kieron Corless

French director Thomas Cailley contrived to pull off an unusual career-propelling double with his first feature *Les Combattants* ('the combatants', or 'the fighters'), a striking, unpredictable Bordeaux-set romantic comedy; it not only grabbed several prizes when it debuted in the prestigious Directors' Fortnight in Cannes last year, but also became a big hit when it opened across France too – auteur credibility and commercial success in one package. According to Cailley, the latter was down to an audience in its late teens and early twenties connecting with the two lead characters and the obstacles they confront and then buzzing favourably about the film on social media.

Those obstacles are, in time-honoured fashion, partly self-imposed and partly thrust upon the leads. Both are in their early twenties and still live with their families (a telling detail). Madeleine (Adèle Haenel) is a middle-class tough nut steeling herself for the apocalypse she's convinced is just round the corner. Arnaud (Kévin Azaïs) is more laid-back, still processing his father's death and half-heartedly working for the family business. His fascination with Madeleine is initially met with complete indifference, not least because he sneakily resorted to biting to win a fight with her.

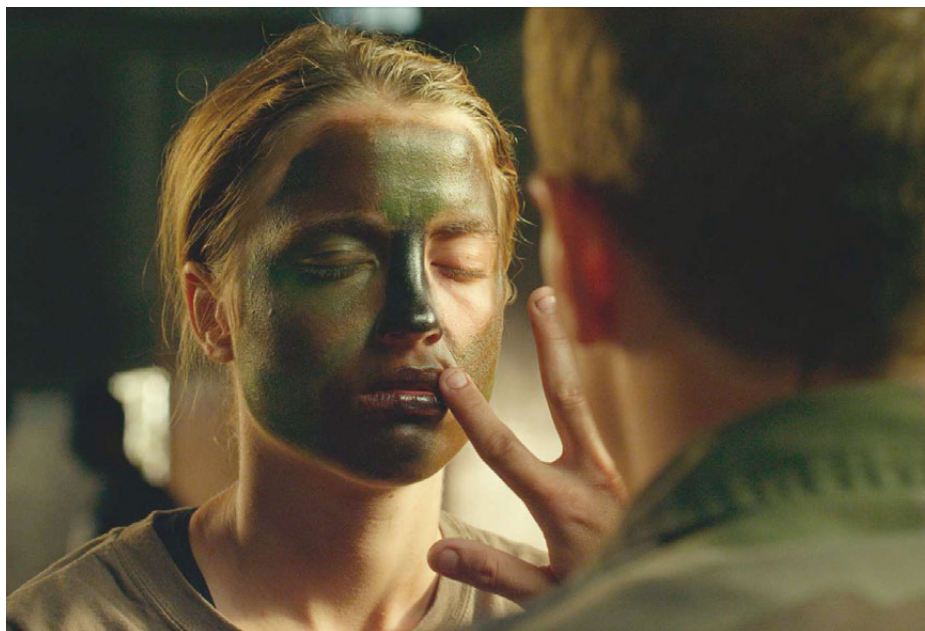
Cailley attended the prestigious Fémis state film school in Paris, which prides itself on perpetuating the French auteur tradition. On one level *Les Combattants* may be a crowd-pleasing romcom, but it definitely takes its own route – Madeleine is far from your typical female character, and there's an underlying seriousness and identification with its young leads, who are negotiating the limited options available in post-crisis France. For all the film's social markers, Cailley seems more attuned to primal forces, both in his characters and the world at large; this is most apparent in those few moments – the mark of an already confident director – when the action slows and the camera just observes his two leads communing with the natural world, and each other.

**Kieron Corless: What was the starting point for *Les Combattants*?**

**Thomas Cailley:** I really wanted to talk about the generation in their early twenties, and I wanted the film to be a sort of existential comedy. When I started writing it, I was often seeing on television late at night these survival shows, *Man vs. Wild*, which is referenced in the film, and I found them really fascinating and contemporary. I find the characters touching in *Man vs. Wild* – it's as if life isn't enough, as if survival is a superior value to life. So that gives a meaning to this character of Madeleine and this love story, which is also a story of survival. I also wanted the film to have a luminous quality.

**KC: Why was that a concern?**

**TC:** Because I don't believe in the way this particular generation is being portrayed. We call it the 'Y' generation, they're described as being selfish, apathetic. But they're a generation that



Take shelter: Adèle Haenel as Madeleine and Kévin Azaïs as Arnaud in *Les Combattants*

has dreams, that's full of energy, that wants to fight for things. That's what the title of the film is about for me: the fighters. They make mistakes, but then they get up again and they start again.

**KC: It made me think it's a film in part about austerity and the problems young people are facing. Was that something you were conscious of as you were writing?**

**TC:** Yes, I'm also a part of this generation. Ever since we were born we've been nursed on the idea of the crisis. Everything's in decline, everything's in crisis, there's nothing to hope for in the future: no more jobs, no more polar bears, no more Amazon forest. Yet at the same time we have these institutions that are always telling us, 'You've got to believe in your dreams, you've got to project into the future' and it seems impossible to do. It puts us in a state of anxiety, we're sort of floating around – and I find this very interesting and poetic.

**KC: You seem at pains in the film to emphasise the characters' different social classes.**

**TC:** He believes in the status quo and a certain

*This generation is described as selfish, apathetic, but they're a generation that has dreams, that wants to fight for things*



Thomas Cailley

conservative approach and she believes in destruction and chaos. This was the confrontation I was interested in more than a social collision. But I like things to be clear and precise at the beginning of the film so that the fiction can take off and we believe in it.

**KC: I wasn't sure what to make of Madeleine – she's unusual and powerful, obsessive, but Arnaud ends up having to take care of her.**

**TC:** Madeleine is actually a very modern female character. I don't know many of them but a few. The thing is we're just not used to seeing characters like this, this powerful woman character, in film, because they tend to be contained in stereotypical roles and in romantic comedies, where you get a more fragile woman. But I like to push characters to the edge of their logic. It's not that he teaches her how to survive – they're both teaching each other... From that point of view it's a very equal film because each of them is stronger together than separately.

**KC: The film completely surprised me by the direction it took in the final third. There was a welcome unpredictability to the story arc.**

**TC:** I structured the film in three parts: Arnaud's world, Madeleine's world – and those two worlds fail, so then they create their own world together. And that third world is that. So throughout the journey we're getting closer to the characters, we're trying to understand what's going on in their minds. Then it just became obligatory to go all the way inside her head, to imagine this end of the world she's always talking about. I like the fact that you're wondering if this is really happening, is it in her head? There's a shot of her where she's watching the ashes fall and she's practically smiling. Is she thinking, 'I was right' or has she gone crazy and taken him along with her? The principle of this type of coming-of-age story is that you don't know what's going to happen. The characters don't know themselves, so it was very important to me that we were on their level. ☺

**i** *Les Combattants* is released in the UK on 19 June and is reviewed on page 71



# THE LIMITS OF CONTROL

One of the great joys of filmmaking, as with all creative endeavours, is riding the line between control and its intuitive, inspirational opposite



**By Mark Cousins**

Am I controlling this article, these next 900-odd words, or are they controlling me? The answer seems obvious. I'm doing the typing.

The page is blank, and I'm filling it. But my aim is to steer myself, and you, into an area which takes us both by surprise. I want to take us to a felt place, a kind of forest which has its own atmospherics, which has a topography that will start to steer us. Topics have structures. I want to find the structure, then let it take over.

There are other metaphors that refer to what the trip to the forest refers to, the purposeful road to submission, to perdition. David Lynch talks about it as a fishing trip. You go to the river, drop in your line, then wait for the idea to bite. Federico Fellini described it as turning the tuning dial on an old-fashioned radio, past the noise until, suddenly, you hear voices or music: ideas, emotions, a structure, the joy of submitting to that structure. And control was the main melody of Freud and Marx. What is desire, Freud's life's obsession, but control or/and its flip side? Theodor Adorno and the unlaughing cavaliers at the Frankfurt School said that popular culture is controlling us, that we must wrest back the steering wheel.

Film is in the forest. By jumping on my bike, cycling to a cinema, buying my ticket and sitting down in the dark, I am saying to the film, or its director, "Here, have two hours of my time and access to my emotions – do something to me. I'll make it easy for you. I'll just sit here. I'll unbutton a bit."

And what does the film do to me? It shows me, in *Some Like It Hot*, a beautiful blonde woman submitting her barely concealed body and heartache to the camera as she sings 'I'm Through with Love'. I submit to her submission. In *Singin' in the Rain* I see a guy in a grey suit sing and dance at night, in a downpour. The camera follows his every move, enslaved to his liberty, his abandon, so much so that when his spirit soars, the camera does too, as if his happiness has entered it like the devil entered Regan in *The Exorcist*.

Such scenes earn my submission. I look at films by the great Asian gradualists Lav Diaz, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Tsai Mingliang or Hou Hsiao-Hsien and see that they control time with an iron grip. Their long-held shots and slowly revealed stories insist and persist, require and conspire. The languor of their films is almost painful at times, but exquisite too, because of the conviction of their directors, their slowing of the heartbeat, the contrast with the rat race outside the cinema, and the way they say, "I'm in charge. I'll give you pleasure, but on my terms."

This makes the forest sound like a heady place, and so it is. Moviegoing is masochistic. In their different ways, the films of Alfred Hitchcock,



*Hollywood wants to make everything easy for us, to suck up to us, to be the big nipple, as Bertolucci once called LA*

Fritz Lang, Brian De Palma, Chantal Akerman and Abbas Kiarostami show this. Hollywood is totally fucked up on the subject of control. It wants to make everything easy for us, to suck up to us, to be the big nipple, as Bernardo Bertolucci once called LA, and yet many of its greatest films (*The Searchers*, *Johnny Guitar*, *Touch of Evil*, *Raging Bull*, etc) do the opposite of sucking. They spit.

So. Where are we? I'm lost. When I started writing this, I knew I was interested in a duopoly, one of life's big duopolies: control and the lack thereof. Then I wrote the word 'forest' and, as a result, realised (a word that already implies submission) that I should try to write this with feeling. As I did so, I noticed (a word which, like 'realised', implies something happening to me) that my words were flushed. Suggestive of sex. That's lack of control for you. It takes you places.

I think I know why this happened. In two days'

time, I head off to Sweden to make my next film. It stars Neneh Cherry and is shot by Chris Doyle. I'm hoping that it will be atmospheric, like the forest. I'm hoping that I won't have to steer it the whole way through, that it will take over, that I can be its stenographer, like I was for the last few paragraphs. The pleasure of such stenography is one of the great things in my life. The forest is so alive – all you have to do is notice that life.

Wish me luck in Stockholm. When the film comes out in a year or so, you'll see if it happened. Directing a film is one of the most controlling jobs in the world. You are God for a while. I will even make it snow inside a building. Then I will come home again, and I think I know what I will do to relax after filming. I will go to see a film. It seems mad to escape filming with a film, but the former is all control, the latter is the opposite.

This is what makes the forest exciting.

• I forgot to mention what most writing about cinema mentions these days – digital and interactivity. As you know, both are about us, not it. The digital age is the era of sucking up – you get what you want, when you want it, as you want it, at the pace you want it. And you can pause it to have a pizza. What's interesting about that? 🍕



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## SLOW WEST



Silas is golden: Michael Fassbender in *Slow West*

How does a successful musician end up as writer-director of an acclaimed western? A little help from Michael Fassbender and Film4 doesn't hurt

**By Charles Gant**

When John Maclean joined The Beta Band in 1997, his education at the Edinburgh College of Art and London's Royal College of Art, plus his particular interests in collage, montage and sampling, made him a natural choice to take a key role in visual communication. He made his first promo video in 1998, and went on to make around 30 more, setting the Scottish indie band's music to clips of samurai martial arts, alien adventure and similar pop-culture riffing. "It was genre, action, lo-fi jokey fare," says Maclean, who had had his early film education working at Edinburgh's Cameo cinema and the Gate in Notting Hill, London. "I was influenced by stuff like *Shogun Assassin* at the time."

A career as a feature film director was not foreseen, but the path led inexorably in that direction after friend-of-a-friend Michael Fassbender caught sight of these early videos, identified a maverick talent and pursued a

collaboration. That faith was to be repaid when Maclean's debut feature *Slow West*, a western starring and executive produced by Fassbender, scooped the World Cinema Dramatic Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival in January.

Maclean's first proper narrative short, *Man on a Motorcycle*, came about after the actor offered one day of shooting on a break from Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* in 2008. "I thought, 'He likes motorcycles,'" Maclean says, "and I had a friend who was a motorcycle courier at the time. He could be the actor for seven days with the helmet on, and then I could do the helmet coming off with Michael."

Disappointment followed when, over a period of nine months, "It got turned down by every single film festival. I had really given up." It got into the 2009 London Film Festival, and at the same time Maclean arranged a private screening, which was attended by a favourably impressed Film4 team member. Film4 commissioned Maclean's second short, *Pitch Black Heist*, which also featured Fassbender (three days of access this time): it won the Bafta short film prize in 2012.

*Pitch Black Heist* was the first production from DMC, a company set up by Fassbender and his London agent Conor McCaughan. Now came the plan for DMC, the director and

star to push towards a feature, with Film4's encouragement and support. A big hurdle was that Maclean didn't see himself as a writer – "I'd come from almost failing English at school, so confidence was low" – but none of the collaborators suggested by Film4 clicked with the director. Maclean says, "I know now looking back that I write and think and make films visually. I can't direct something that I've not written, because I need to write it as shots. In the end, I'll have the whole film in my head." Meanwhile, left to his own devices, he came up with "a crazy psychedelic western script that was a complete mess. It was almost like automatic writing, and not at all structured."

Maclean had been named a 2011 Star of Tomorrow in *Screen International's* annual talent celebration, and two of his fellow honorees mentioned working with UK script editor Kate Leys – a suggestion that was more than acceptable to Film4. "We immediately hit it off," Maclean says. "She was the first person I met who said that I was a writer, and gave me the confidence just to start. She read the crazy psychedelic thing I'd written and said, 'Let's park that... in the bin. And let's get the story on one sheet of paper, and start to work it.' She was amazing because she doesn't actually write, but she's very good at



making you write, and getting the story out of you, concentrating on the right ingredients.”

At a series of script meetings with Fassbender, *Slow West* – which depicts the journey of two men across the American frontier at the end of the 19th century – saw its dark deadpan humour enriched. Then came a tricky moment.

Maclean explains: “In the early days I had Michael as the lead, so Michael was Jay. As I developed Jay as a man on a romantic quest, he started to become younger and younger. I remember thinking, ‘Oh my God, Michael’s no longer the lead. How am I going to approach this subject?’ I turned up at Michael’s house that day and we read the script. Michael said, ‘I’m not Jay, am I?’ I said, ‘I’m glad you said that. I think you’re Silas, the older one.’ From then on, he really embraced the idea of being more of a mentor.” New Zealand-born Kodi Smit-McPhee (*The Road*) instead snagged the lead role of 16-year-old Jay, who travels from Scotland to Colorado in search of his lost love.

Throughout the writing period, Maclean immersed himself in the classics – “I’d watched a lot of films, but I hadn’t really done the big hitters, so I started watching Tarkovsky, Bergman, Kurosawa” – while also loading up on books written at the time, by the likes of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce. He also dived into screenplays, taking inspiration from the spare construction of Ridley Scott’s *Alien*. “When you read that script, everything is so distilled into just the necessary words. I didn’t want any rambling

*‘Tessa Ross called it a bullseye film, where any shift left or right of centre can knock it off. It has to be right’*

lines or huge paragraphs of dialogue. Every line in the film, I worked quite hard at having it mean something, or more than one thing.”

At Hollywood studios, many a project has lost heat due to the revolving door of executives, and *Slow West* might have met a similar fate when Jo McClellan, Katherine Butler and Tessa Ross all left Film4 in succession. But the company successfully passed the torch along. “Jo left and then I was with Katherine, and Katherine left and I was with Tessa, and then Tessa left. Tessa was three-quarters of the way through the edit. I worked with Rose [Garnett] for the last bit of the edit.”

Former Film4 boss Ross had always been clear about the need for pinpoint execution with *Slow West*, focusing attention on getting the pacing exactly right. “Tessa called it a bullseye film,” Maclean says, “where any [shift] left or right of centre can knock it off. It has to be right. That was the trickiest thing in the edit.

“With the flashbacks as well, it’s quite hard to keep the energy up on a road movie. They’re going slowly on a horse. You want to tell the audience that this is *Slow West*, not *Fast West*, and there’s a lot of ground to be travelled. But at the same time, we’re making an action picture.”



***Slow West* is released in UK cinemas on June 26 and is reviewed on page 88**

## THE NUMBERS TOO MANY MOVIES?

By Charles Gant

Just over a year ago, at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy’s *The Tribe* premiered to major acclaim, winning the Critics’ Week Grand Prize. Fans applauded a highly original work, which utilised a largely deaf cast and was performed in sign language without subtitles. Five months later, the Ukrainian film scooped the Sutherland Award for debut feature at the London Film Festival, then landed in eighth position in *Sight & Sound*’s poll of the best films of 2014.

So when Metrodome released *The Tribe* in May this year – having waited for a gap in the calendar following Oscar season and then the likes of *Wild Tales* and *Force Majeure* – the distributor could be forgiven for imagining an adventurous arthouse audience would be eager to discover this unique auteur offering. What it probably didn’t anticipate, when it first settled on May 15 as the release date, is that *The Tribe* would be one of a bewildering 87 films released that month, all competing for audiences’ attention.

Two decades ago, a typical week would see five or six new releases in the UK. Now that number is more likely to be around 15, and in the first weekend of May this year it was an astonishing 24. Jason Wood, former chief booker at Curzon and now artistic director of film at the new Manchester venue Home, comments: “It is becoming untenable. That is

obvious. It is untenable for cinema operators, for audiences and for the media. The situation really is at saturation point in the UK.”

The bumper crop at UK cinemas in May coincided with the first reports of a development that had in fact already occurred: the *New York Times* deciding it can no longer review every new theatrical release. The NYT critic Manohla Dargis offered the context in a 2014 article: “Dumping crummy movies that should go straight to on-demand into theaters just to get a review is no way to sustain, much less build, a healthy film culture.”

Home’s five screens meant that Wood was able to give a proper berth to prime May titles, including *Girlhood*, *Phoenix*, *The New Girlfriend* and *Clouds of Sils Maria*, but pressure on space meant he had to take *The Tribe* off after a week (at press time it was set to return). Other films were not so lucky. “I was disappointed to have to play *Honeytrap* off date and I still have to find a date for *A Fuller Life*,” says Wood. “I regret not finding any space for *Still*.” The box-office results for some of the less-favoured titles (see below) suggests that, amid the avalanche of releases, other UK exhibitors faced similar problems. And if audiences, overwhelmed by the choice, end up stampeding in numbers towards the film that looks like the safest bet (in May’s case, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, £5.4 million box office and counting), nobody should be too surprised. ☹



*Girlhood*



*The Tribe*

### SELECTED HITS AND MISSES AT THE UK BOX OFFICE, MAY 2015\*

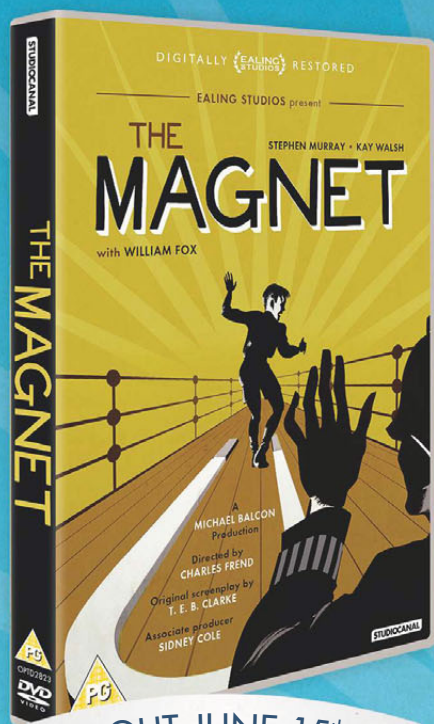
Film	Release date	Box-office
Girlhood	May 8	£184,840
Clouds of Sils Maria	May 15	£138,325
Phoenix	May 8	£96,612
Samba	May 1	£46,213
The Tribe	May 15	£25,542
Rosewater	May 8	£22,404
Argerich	May 1	£8,425
Honeytrap	May 8	£3,462
Futuro Beach	May 8	£3,338
A Fuller Life	May 15	£931

\*All grosses to May 25

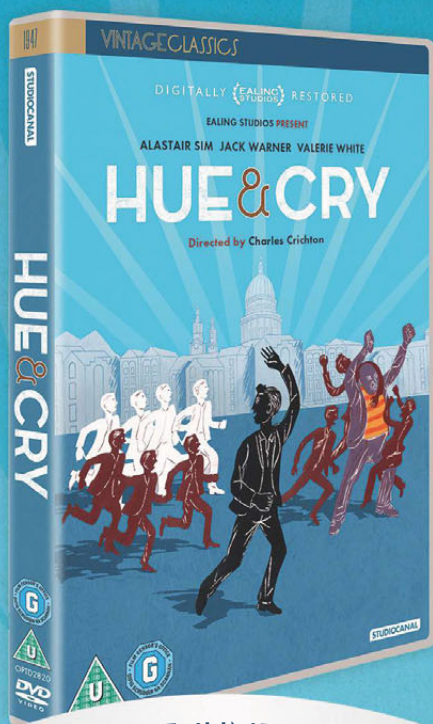


# THE EALING STUDIOS COLLECTION

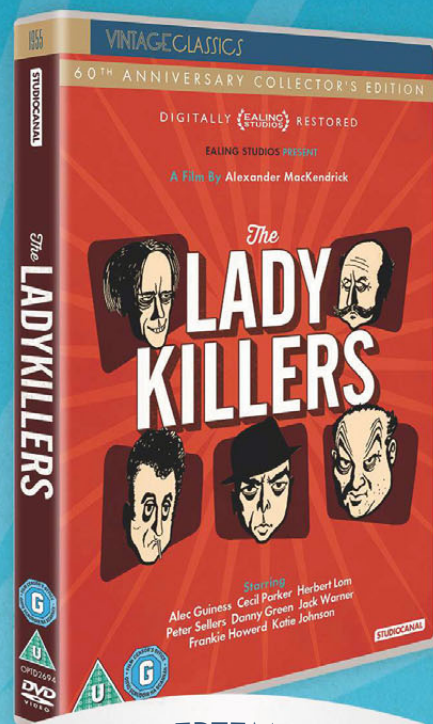
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## IT'S GOOD TO SHARE

## BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

As the landscape for international co-productions changes, we have to find new ways of supporting – and defining – British films



**By Ben Roberts**

The prizes have been awarded, but the jury is still out: was it a good Cannes for British films?

Not a vintage year at first glance, but

better than you might think; in particular, it gave us a sense of the landscape for international co-production. It also raised questions for me about the nationality of what and who we choose to fund with Lottery money.

Six films in the official selection (five of them in Competition) were UK productions or co-productions or otherwise had a UK producer. Four of these – *The Lobster*, *Carol*, *Youth* and *Macbeth* – were official UK productions or co-productions with a non-British director. In fact, Asif Kapadia, whose *Amy* screened in the official selection out of Competition, was the only Brit director with a feature in the mix this year.

Some specifics: *Carol* has a British producer (Elizabeth Karlsen from Number 9 Films) and an American director (Todd Haynes). Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth* was shot partly in London with some British cast (Michael Caine, Rachel Weisz) and a UK co-producer (Number 9, again); and *Macbeth* – British to its core – was produced by See Saw (*The King's Speech*), shot in England and Scotland, but directed by an Australian (*Snowtown*'s Justin Kurzel). All three were also co-financed in development and/or production by UK broadcaster and financier Film4.

Matteo Garrone's *Tale of Tales* was an Italian/French co-production, but shot in English and produced by Jeremy Thomas and his Recorded Picture Company, sold by his sales company HanWay, and co-financed by the emerging UK equity financier New Sparta.

*The Lobster* had the most complex co-financing model: its producers heroically pieced together via a five-way international deal (Greece, UK, Ireland, Netherlands, France) for their Greek director (Yorgos Lanthimos) to make his English-language debut. Happily for us, it was also the first film backed by the BFI with Lottery money set aside for co-productions in which the UK has a minority stake (Film4 also co-financed). We already invest in many co-productions, and all European-based production companies can apply for Lottery funding; but the minority co-production pot, up to £1 million a year, was established to let us break our own rules, and to acknowledge that the UK has not been the easiest place to partner on co-productions.

*Six films in the Cannes official selection were UK productions or co-productions or otherwise had a UK producer*



Party of five: *The Lobster*

Reasons include the UK's 1996 withdrawal from Eurimages; a minimum UK spend requirement for films looking to benefit from the film tax relief; and last year's ruling by HMRC that co-productions were excluded from funding through the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS).

Eurimages is a cultural support fund with an annual budget of €25 million, contributed by 36 members; projects are selected for support by its board. Many producers argue strongly that the UK should rejoin, but our contribution would probably need to come from the Lottery, which would mean a reduction in the current Lottery production fund to balance against more opportunities for those producers and projects that we didn't choose to support.

Some recent changes to UK film tax relief, reducing the minimum UK spend from 25 per cent to 10 per cent of a film's budget, should be helpful, allowing more British producers to board films as minority co-producers.

At Cannes we announced that we were extending the minority co-production fund to development as well as production. This will allow us to move away from our usual funding priorities, which are focused largely on supporting the careers of UK filmmakers. There is far more to the make-up of a film than its director. But with Lottery being 'good cause' money, and upwards of 500 applications received every year for around 25 awards, having a British director has always felt like an important priority to us, though we often make exceptions (such as supporting *The Riot Club*, directed by Denmark's Lone Scherfig).

More controversial, maybe, is our support for British filmmakers – such as Andrea Arnold, with her next film *American Honey* – shooting in the US. That support allows our best filmmakers to travel without losing independence, but it can benefit a large international cast and crew while taking all but the minimum spend out of the UK. Unlike the tax relief, Lottery funding is not tied to the amount of money being spent within the UK, but we're conscious that there are more of our filmmakers setting their next films in the US in particular, so we have to achieve a balance.

There were other British films and filmmakers we hoped to see in the mix at Cannes; they will have to wait until later in the year for their moment in the sun. Meanwhile we should celebrate the fact that the UK is becoming more attractive to international production partners. @bfbfen

## IN PRODUCTION

- **John Michael McDonagh**, the Irish writer/director of *The Guard* and *Calvary*, is shooting *War on Everyone* in New Mexico. The film stars Michael Peña and Alexander Skarsgård as a pair of corrupt cops who run into trouble when they cross someone still more corrupt than they are.
- **The Dardenne brothers** are preparing to shoot their next film *The Unknown Girl* (*La Fille inconnue*) this autumn. Adèle Haenel will star as a doctor who refuses to open the door of her surgery to an unidentified young woman: when the woman is found dead shortly after, the doctor's guilt impels her to find out more about the woman's identity.
- **Park Chan-wook** is returning to Korea for his next film, after the English-language *Stoker* in 2013: an adaptation of Sarah Waters's novel *Fingersmith*. The plot, about a thief and a con-man who target a wealthy young woman, is being relocated from Victorian London to 1930s Korea and Japan. Ha Jung-woo and Kim Min-hee are to star.
- **Mike Newell** has taken over directing duties on *The Comedian* from Sean Penn. The film, set to star Robert De Niro as an 'insult comic' is based on a screenplay by Art Linson and Jeffrey Ross. How far De Niro will choose to channel his great performance as Rupert Pupkin in Scorsese's *The King of Comedy* is something only the actor can say.
- **Todd Haynes**, on a high following the reception for *Carol* at Cannes, is reportedly keen to adapt *Wonderstruck*, a children's book by Brian Selznick, author of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, the source for Scorsese's *Hugo*. Haynes is also linked to an as-yet-untitled biopic of singer Peggy Lee, to star Reese Witherspoon. Which will see the light of day first, or at all, remains to be seen.
- **Xavier Dolan** (below) isn't letting the pace flag; the prolific Canadian's next film will be *It's Only the End of the World*, and is to star some of the biggest names in French cinema: Marion Cotillard, Léa Seydoux, Vincent Cassel, Gaspard Ulliel and Nathalie Baye. The film, based on a stage play by Jean-Luc Lagarce, concerns a writer who goes back to his hometown to announce his upcoming death to his family, only for the visit to spiral into resentments and arguments.





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HONG KONG

## TESTING THE WATERS

New work from Tsai Mingliang, Tsui Hark and Sylvia Chang helped reassert HKIFF's credentials as the region's most cinephile festival

**By Tony Rayns**

The two best East Asian indie features of the past year were sadly missing from the Hong Kong International Film Festival this time, but the region's longest established and most cinephile festival redeemed itself in many other ways. First off, it mounted the first-ever tribute to Sylvia Chang's work as a director and actor and opened with the world premiere of her latest (and best) feature *Murmur of the Hearts* (*Nian Nian*). This is a drama with strong psychological and political undercurrents about a woman painter who hasn't seen her brother since their parents divorced; she's married to a boxer and their relationship falls apart as his career goes down the pan. The film's structure is a little over-complicated, but it makes its points about failed parenting and damaged lives with real emotional clout. Good to see Chang directing again in the same year that she guest-stars in the final chapter of Jia Zhangke's *Mountains May Depart*.

The missing gems, incidentally, were Ju Anqi's remarkable *Poet on a Business Trip* (top prizewinner in Jeonju a few weeks later) and Suzuki Yohei's equally remarkable *Ow* (reportedly a big hit in Lincoln Center's New Directors/New Films, with an overdue European premiere coming up shortly in Vienna). HKIFF made up for their absence with such titles as Phan Dang Di's *Big Father, Small Father and Other Stories* (*Cha và Con vậ*), a startlingly frank movie about vasectomy and inchoate desire which confirms that Vietnamese

cinema has entered a new era of sophistication, and the late Wu Tianming's swansong *Song of the Phoenix* (*Bai Niao Chao Feng*), which explores the ambiguities of the teacher-pupil gestalt across a very touching tale of the decline of *suona* bands in China's rural communities. It also had an actual blockbuster in the shape of *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* (*Zhiqiu Wei Hushan*), in which Tsui Hark transforms the old communist warhorse into a highly entertaining Indiana Jones-style spectacle in 3D. This has triumphed at the Mainland China box office, but I'm told Tsui has declined the Chinese army's request that he work his magic on other vintage propaganda vehicles.

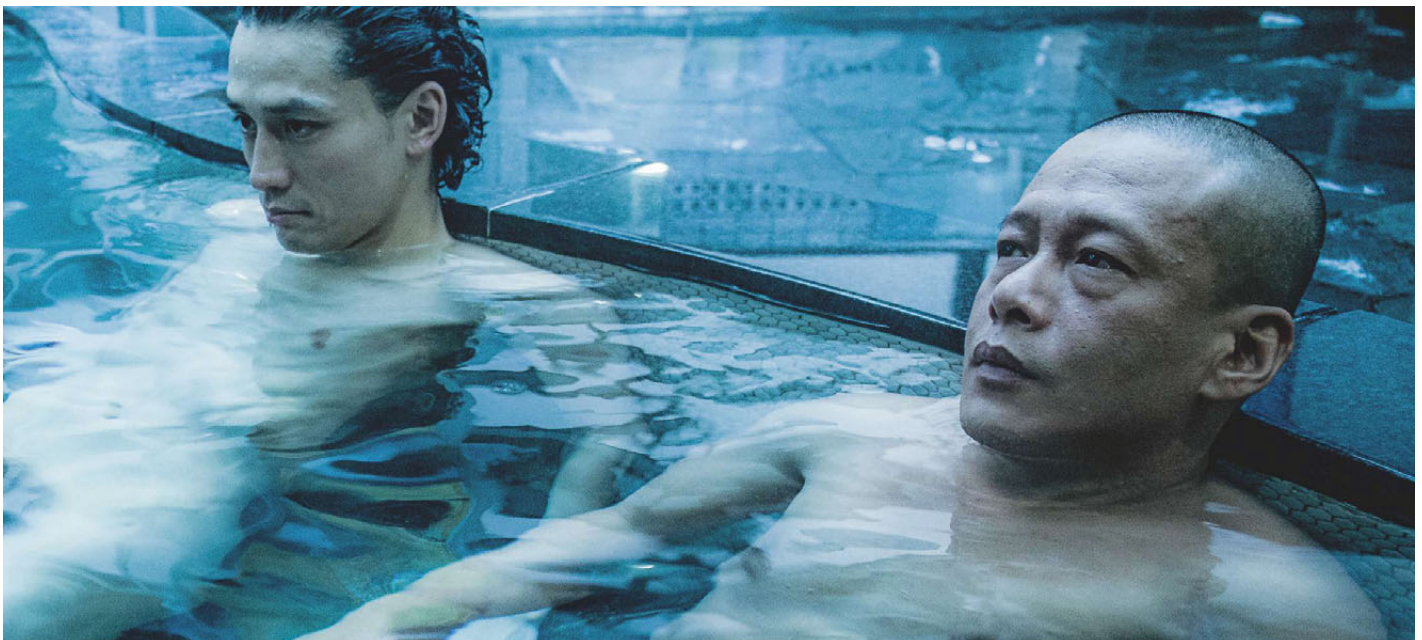
Besides browsing the festival's excellent publications – books on Sylvia Chang and Naruse Mikio, the latter containing new translations from Japanese of Naruse's own writings – and being struck once again at the *Horse Money* Q&A by the contrast between Pedro Costa's on-stage humility and off-stage self-importance, I took in a couple of interesting documentaries about filmmakers. Walter Salles's *Jia Zhangke: A Guy from Fenyang* does a fine job tracing Jia's roots in rural Shanxi and teasing out some of the ways he refracts China's pressing social and political issues through the lives of his characters. Christian Braad Thomsen's trawl through his own archives for Fassbinder: *To Love Without Demands* is less sure-footed in reaching for the space between Fassbinder's films and his private persona. It relies far too much on an uncritical interview with

*Do their hands reach towards each other in the bath, or is that an illusion caused by the water's refractions?*

Irm Hermann in which she discusses at great length the ways Fassbinder used and abused her, but also features a very amusing interview with Harry Baer, concise and genuinely perceptive.

In recent years HKIFF has been teaming up with the Chinese online video site YouKu to produce original short films by East Asian auteurs, and four more were premiered this year in a package titled *Beautiful 2015*. It began life as a pan-Asian project but has gravitated more and more to Chinese directors – although this year's package includes Mohsen Makhmalbaf's *Tenant*, a wry vignette about the travails of an Iranian refugee in London, the director's own current refuge. The stand-out in *Beautiful 2015*, though, is Tsai Mingliang's *No No Sleep* (*Wu Wu Mian*), a 35-minute coda to the Walker series, again featuring Tsai's fetish actor Lee Kangsheng as a Buddhist monk traversing an urban landscape in extreme slow-motion.

*No No Sleep* is set in Tokyo, and this time the monk's barefoot perambulation is merely a brief prelude. It's followed by a view of the night city from the Yamanote Line, the elevated railway which circles Tokyo, similar in effect to the shot of Tokyo by night in Edward Yang's *A One and a Two*, and then by sequences in a *senjo* public bath-house and a capsule hotel. While the monk soaks in hot water, Tsai's attention shifts to another customer (played by Ando Masanobu, star of Kitano's *Kids Return* and Miike's *Big Bang Love*), who performs his ablutions without a fig-leaf of modesty and then lowers himself into the bath right next to the monk. Do their hands reach towards each other, or is that an illusion caused by the water's refractions? Later we see them in their capsules, the Japanese man tossing and turning, the monk fast asleep. Tsai's perennial themes of unvoiced gay desire and nervous inhibition are stated in sharp-focus images of tantalising ambiguity. **S**



Lust, caution: Tsai Mingliang's *No No Sleep* explores the director's perennial theme of unvoiced gay desire in images of tantalising ambiguity



# CANNES

## HUNTING SEASON

This year's festival saw thoroughly deserving prize-winners in Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *wuxia* tale *The Assassin* and László Nemes's Holocaust drama *Son of Saul*, but the Competition as a whole was a rather lacklustre affair, arguably overshadowed by the strength and invention of Directors' Fortnight. **By Nick James**

What was Cannes all about this year? That question proved to be a conundrum, especially for those following the lacklustre official selection closely. If you took the opening film, Emmanuelle Bercot's *Standing Tall* (*La Tête haute*), as a cue, you'd have thought condition-of-Europe social realism was the answer. Bercot's film is a stop-start tale about a winsome teen delinquent, Malony (Rod Paradot) – implausibly sentimental about him and indulgent of his violent outbursts (unless French officials really are as saintly as Catherine Deneuve's judge and her colleagues in the juvenile care system are depicted here).

But the only subsequent film of any strength in the main line-up which followed this theme was Stéphane Brizé's *The Measure of a Man* (*La Loi du marché*), a spot-on satire of global market capitalism, which follows 51-year-old Thierry, an ordinary guy searching for a job who is taken on as a security guard in a supermarket. (Thierry is played by the ever-excellent Vincent Lindon, who deservedly won the Best Actor prize). Various staff members (played with quiet dignity by non-actors) are questioned about petty pilfering, and the management talk a familiar fake language of corporate concern for the individual, but the film leaves out dramatic arrests, concentrating instead on their consequence. It's a low-key, soberly incisive work that stood quite alone.

Radu Muntean's *One Floor Below* follows the pattern of so many Romanian successes of recent years: a bleak and sticky situation develops around a potential crime that causes the build-up of psychological pressures of a Dostoevskian nature. Patrascu (Teodor Corban), a man who deals in car registrations, is climbing his apartment block stairs when he overhears a violent argument between a husband and his wife. The next day, the wife is found dead, but when the police visit Patrascu, he says nothing. Afterward, Vali Dima (Iulian Postelnicu), the husband from the floor below, begins to infiltrate Patrascu's life in small ways, wanting to repay him for his silence. How Patrascu deals with this is the poignant heart of a film of exact mood and intense downplayed expression which maintains the very high standard of Romanian

social realism but is really more interested in psychology than social circumstances.

More films preferred to assess the condition of Europe through allegory or parable rather than realism, though. You could, supposedly, read much into Matteo Garrone's gaudily imagined *Tale of Tales*, a mish-mash of a folk-tale along Brothers Grimm lines with many vivid moments, visually often Pre-Raphaelite or straight-out grotesque; but it suffers from a syndrome common in Cannes this year: terrible dialogue in English from a non-native-speaking team of director and screenwriters. Its tangle of tales is

too elaborate to describe here – the one about the amiable princess forced to marry a huge, filthy, lethal ogre is probably the most amusing – but the theme of neighbouring kingdoms rubbing along while subject to aristocratic whims does little to illuminate contemporary politics, and the whole proved easy to forget.

Yorgos Lanthimos's Kafka-meets-H. G. Wells allegory *The Lobster* is much more memorable. It sets up a witheringly droll imaginary world in which conventional single people are sent to a hotel and given a limited number of days to find a sexual partner or else be turned into an animal of their choice (you might read a specifically Greek angle into the deadlines and threats). Colin Farrell is our meek avatar, who chooses the lobster as his possible fate, and while the film stays within its kitsch hotel environment, with its semi-sadistic rules and deadpan dinner-dance social hells, the fecund Lanthimos continually comes up with novel and/or amusing satirical and absurdist moments. But when the focus shifts to the rebels in the woods – led by a ruthless Léa Seydoux – and a forbidden semaphore romance blooms between Farrell and Rachel Weisz, the film loses charm and momentum, despite Weisz's fine, nuanced performance.

Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth* is also set in a hotel – this time a very expensive and sensuous Swiss spa. This is not so much an allegory about Europe as a twee comic fantasy about accepting old age. The hotel guests are all 'characters' of one sort or another, not least Michael Caine's melancholic great composer and Harvey Keitel's washed-up film director – whose jokes come off better than I expected after watching the film's smug trailer. Caine's timing is as perfect as ever, but the sheer bathos of the piece, with its bombardment of cute ideas, self-help aphorisms, kooky cameos – not least Jane Fonda as a still active Hollywood legend made up to look like a Milanese catwalk vulture – and its reliance on teeth-achingly terrible music crashes the whole project long before the end.

The most satisfying of these elaborate fantasy visions was Belgian director Jaco Van Dormael's fountain of fun ideas

### MY CANNES TOP TEN

1. *The Assassin* Hou Hsiao-Hsien
2. *Amy* Asif Kapadia
3. *Son of Saul* László Nemes
4. *Carol* Todd Haynes
5. *The Measure of a Man* Stéphane Brizé
6. *Mad Max: Fury Road* George Miller
7. *My Golden Days* Arnaud Desplechin
8. *Arabian Nights pt 1* Miguel Gomes
9. *Mountains May Depart* Jia Zhangke
10. *A Brand New Testament*

Jaco Van Dormael







Killer instinct: Shu Qi as Nie Yinniang in *The Assassin*, for which Hou Hsiao-Hsien won the Best Director prize; and (left) Arnaud Desplechin's *My Golden Days*



**The Brand New Testament**, a joyous satire in which the daughter of a malicious God sets out to unruin the world he created. Benoît Poelvoorde plays the robe and slippers-wearing old git who first creates Brussels (using a laptop), fills it with animals, then gets pleasure from the sod's laws he inflicts on his new creations, the humans. His locked-up teenage daughter has had enough of his cruelty, and so, with the help of her deceased older brother JC, she breaks out of their apartment and begins collecting her own offbeat apostles. This is a film of almost ceaseless invention, the ideas flowing much quicker and fresher than those of Sorrentino. There are a few feeble and sentimental moments, but, overall, *TBNT* – Dormael's best film in more than 20 years – wins through. Of course, it was not in official selection but in Directors' Fortnight.

The field in Directors' Fortnight was arguably much stronger than in Competition, and dominated by Miguel Gomes's three-part *Arabian Nights*, the best of these allegory-of-post-crash-Europe films. I only saw the first part of this sprawling, angry, comical gallimaufry of personal testimony and imaginative mythologising, but it was enough for me to recommend it heartily (see more on page 22).

Other hits in this alternative programme include Arnaud Desplechin's evocation of a lost love *My Golden Days* (see page 25), and Jeremy Saulnier's intricate, grisly pleasure **Green Room**, in which a punk band, The Ain't Rights, on the brink of splitting up, inadvertently witness a brutal killing backstage at a backwoods venue. Penned in by skinhead assassins and vicious throat-tearing dogs, our genteel musicians have to discover their survival instincts. It's a beautifully acted, darkly comic genre treat.

*Green Room* was one of the smattering of US films to be found across the programmes – fewer than usual. Todd Haynes's *Carol* was the standout for me: a woozy, grainy trance of an adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's lesbian novel. The film is so in love with exactitude it would be intimidating if it weren't for the superb glimmers of raging passion, hidden beneath a glacial social surface, that Cate Blanchett allows the society lady of the title. But it was Rooney Mara's poignant and note-perfect portrayal of Therese – the mooning shopgirl in search of her true feelings – who shared the Best Actress prize (with Emmanuelle Bercot, who won for her melodramatic turn in Maiwenn's *Mon roi*).



Stéphane Brizé's *The Measure of a Man*



Animal attraction: Colin Farrell and Rachel Weisz in Yorgos Lanthimos's surreal *The Lobster*

Though George Miller's blockbuster **Mad Max: Fury Road** stole all the spectacle points, with its heavy-metal momentum, visual dazzle and iconic performances, Denis Villeneuve's sombre juggernaut of a border drug-war drama, **Sicario**, had its own shock-and-awe dynamics. This tale of CIA black ops is a machine-tooled experience, with incredible work from cinematographer Roger Deakins in capturing the "land of the wolf" between Texas, Arizona and Mexico. As a cavalcade of sinister 4x4s heads into Juárez, Mexico's most gang-ridden city, the film thunderously racks up the tension through some of the most astounding, howling film music I've heard in a while. Yet it was one

*Jeremy Saulnier's intricate, grisly pleasure 'Green Room' is a beautifully acted, darkly comic genre treat*



Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room*

of the films I admired less here, for two reasons: first, it underserves Kate Macer (Emily Blunt), its central cop character, characterised as a mulish goody-goody who can't comprehend the black ops *Realpolitik* of Josh Brolin's smiling spook or Benicio Del Toro's unsmiling assassin, so that she keeps asking irrelevant questions. Second, its critique of the failed war on drugs is barely skin deep, so that at best it doesn't seem to know, between Blunt and Brolin, which side it's on.

One of the most terrifying radio dramas I have ever listened to is the soundtrack of events happening off screen in László Nemes's film **Son of Saul**, which won the Grand Prix – a maelstrom of screamed orders, clanking machinery, grinding motors, brutal beatings and random shootings that almost never dies down. The camera mostly keeps tight to the face or back of Saul Ausländer (Géza Röhrig), a resilient Hungarian Jew who has survived in a German concentration camp by becoming one of the Sonderkommando, tasked with helping the Nazis exterminate his brethren.



Paolo Sorrentino's *Youth*



Nemes goes out of his way to avoid Holocaust porn – snatches of epic scenes of crowds, vehicles, costumes, gas ovens, burnings, etc, are seen only at the edges of the frame. The soundtrack and the pressure of unseen but foreshadowed events wears you down, as the frantic push-pull between slaughter and survival continues. When a young boy briefly survives the Zyklon B, Saul recognises him as his son, and, obsessed with trying to arrange a proper Jewish burial for him, takes all kinds of risks in order to retrieve the body and track down a rabbi who can show him the correct procedure. In a conventional Holocaust movie, such a melodramatic sequence of events would have undermined the director's stand – some say it still does; and a literalist might carp at how often *Ausländer* seems to be a free agent, able to go where he pleases. For me, though, it's as if, with the big red Sonderkommando 'X' on his back, he becomes a ghost while still alive; and like *Ausländer*'s life, every state of being *Son of Saul* puts us through feels very temporary indeed.

To me, Nemes's film was a very plausible contender for the Palme d'Or; I wish I could say the same for the actual winner, Jacques Audiard's **Dheepan**, which is likewise steeped in violence. The title character is a Tamil Tiger veteran (played by a compelling Jesuthasan Antonythasan) who hurriedly assembles a fake family out of himself and two other refugees in order to escape Sri Lanka after the rebel war has been lost to the government. Dheepan gets a job as the caretaker of a *banlieue* block in France, while his 'wife' Yalini (Kalieaswari Srinivasan) finds a position looking after the ailing godfather of a drug gang now run by his son. Though there are pointers that some kind of painful ending is brewing, much of the time the film holds out the hope that it might be a searing, low-key realist tale of survival and violence spurned; but in a final leap of tone giddily out of proportion to what we have seen, Dheepan's experience as a warrior is required to free them again from new dire circumstances. It is a consummately made work, and had it stayed truer to the tone established throughout I would have no quibble with its victory. As it is, it's as if Cannes has rewarded a *Taxi Driver* ending tacked on to a Dardennes brothers film.

My favourite film – and arguably the critics' – was Hou Hsiao-Hsien's **The Assassin**, which was worthy of its Best Director prize. What's so special about this oblique take on the historical *wuxia* epic are the long quiet



Burial rites: Géza Röhrig in László Nemes's *Son of Saul*, which won the Grand Prix

sequences between the action, where the ability of trained murderer Nie Yinniang (Shu Qi) to melt into the shadows creates a delicious dynamic between the sheer beauty of diaphanous, wafting curtains, billowing gauzes and waving tree branches and our anticipation that our gorgeous assassin will appear among them to stir things up. Its story, however, though well known to Chinese audiences, was not sufficiently clear for others to make a Palme winner.

The real theme of Cannes (which I address in this month's editorial) was an all-pervasive sentimental fascination with grief and mourning. Nanni Moretti's **My Mother** was one of the better examples, coming on with all the

*The real theme of this year's Cannes was an all-pervasive sentimental fascination with grief and mourning*

confidence you'd expect from so accomplished a director, though with perhaps a little too much chutzpah for something so delicate. Margherita (the excellent Margherita Buy) is a film director trying to battle through a difficult shoot while her mother is on her deathbed. Her main problem is her over-confident and under-prepared American lead actor Barry Huggins (John Turturro); meanwhile, her brother Giovanni (Moretti) is being just a little too cool and sensible about their mother's imminent demise, and she is plagued by the kind of memories grieving brings on. The music cues might seem obvious at first, but they work every time (Arvo Pärt, Leonard Cohen). Turturro's performance – including a hilarious goofball dance – acts overacting out of the park, but counterpoints the theme of grieving nicely. *Mia Madre* is like the friend you only appreciate after they've gone home; its fragility seems typical of so many films in what was this year a curate's egg of a festival. ☹



Denis Villeneuve's *Sicario*



Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan*



Nanni Moretti's *My Mother*



# AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER



Lake placid: Apichatpong Weerasethakul's remarkable and mysterious *Cemetery of Splendour*

The likes of *Carol* and *Arabian Nights* saw established auteurs on fabulous form, but there were few genuinely unexpected revelations

## By Isabel Stevens

You hope for two things from the cinema carnival that is Cannes: discoveries from unheralded filmmakers and daring excellence and originality from known auteurs. This edition of the festival was crammed with fêted directors, and in its best moments – László Nemes's debut *Son of Saul* aside – they were the ones who were pushing cinema in new directions or, at the very least, making some of the best films of their careers. Unexpected revelations, of the kind Cannes offered last year with *The Tribe* and *It Follows*, were mostly absent. But then, with so many films screened over 11 days, there was that nagging sense that there were plenty that got away.

The Un Certain Regard prize went to Grímur Hákonarson's *Rams*, a tale of brotherly hatred between two hermit farmers. It is a competently executed film that sketches farming practices and the isolation of its remote Icelandic setting with care, yet its schematic plot and mixture of bleak humour and tragedy felt all too familiar. Another sheep saga, Yared Zeleke's *Lamb*, is a more unusual story. The first Ethiopian film to earn a place in official selection at Cannes is a tender and nuanced view of the realities of poverty and drought for subsistence farmers

## MY CANNES TOP TEN

1. **The Assassin** Hou Hsiao-Hsien
2. **Carol** Todd Haynes
3. **Cemetery of Splendour** Apichatpong Weerasethakul
4. **Arabian Nights** Miguel Gomes
5. **Mountains May Depart** Jia Zhangke
6. **My Golden Days** Arnaud Desplechin
7. **The Lobster** Yorgos Lanthimos
8. **Dheepan** Jacques Audiard
9. **Hitchcock/Truffaut** Kent Jones
10. **Maryland** Alice Winocour



there, viewed through the eyes of a boy who doesn't want to slaughter his only friend, a sheep. It shows lives and daily traditions rarely seen on the big screen, has vivid characters (a domineering archetype of an uncle aside) and in its most successful moments isn't sentimental but entirely matter of fact about death.

With her second film, French director Alice Winocour has delivered a tense, atmospheric, sonically alive mansion-invasion thriller. There are plot holes aplenty in *Maryland* and at times it is tonally askew, but Winocour's depiction of the paranoid mental state of Matthias Schoenaerts's insular war-scarred soldier turned security guard, her eerie *Rear Window*-style surveillance scenes and cool treatment of the central relationship at the film's core (rather than the shady arms business in the background), mark her as a director to watch. Winocour also co-wrote the script for another film in Cannes, Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang*, a critique of female repression focusing on a family of five sisters in a conservative Turkish village – disappointing, despite some memorable naturalistic scenes and spirited characters.

The most ambitious, industrious undertaking at the festival was Miguel Gomes's quasi-adaptation of the classic Middle Eastern folktales, *Arabian Nights*, a 381-minute maze-like triptych reportedly rejected from the main slate and which took refuge in the rebellious Competition-baiting sidebar of Directors' Fortnight. Gomes is one of only a few auteurs to tackle the financial crisis head on and this portrait of his native







Punch-drunk love: Cate Blanchett in Todd Haynes's devastating *Carol*, for which Rooney Mara shared the Best Actress prize



Portugal mixes fiction, documentary (informed by journalists' extensive research) and absurdism where most would favour intimate social realism (as indeed Stéphane Brizé did in Competition with *The Measure of a Man*). At the film's outset, the camera bobs alongside a Portuguese shipyard, taking in the mass of laid-off workers lined up on its harbour to a soundtrack of their testimonies of the glory days of busy industry there, while silent cranes loom like giant gravestones in the background. By the end of Gomes's animal- and water-obsessed epic, he has mingled banal and opulent stories and spectacles – about wasp plagues, teenage firefighters, chaffinch hunters, talking cockerels, protests, an unwanted dog, evictions, an exploded whale – and in the film's most riveting chapter, Scheherazade herself and her plight as a doomed storyteller. If his denunciations of government austerity can seem too smugly farcical at times (such as his fable 'The Tale of the Men with Hard-Ons') and some imaginative stories drift on too long, there is always a deliriously surprising turn in waiting, along with moments of *outré* visual experimentation (split screens, double exposure, upside-down landscapes) and Gomes's trademark wistful pop soundtrack. It's a film about escapism that manages to mine the desperation and precarious lives of ordinary people too. How it will be released in the UK remains to be seen, but the three elements deserve to be seen as closely together as possible.

**Cemetery of Splendour** (hands down the most alluring title of the festival) is another film with political stories lurking beneath the surface and one which also undeservedly failed to make the Competition. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's remarkable and mysterious film centres on a middle-aged, lonely hospital volunteer Jenjira (played by Apichatpong regular Jenjira Pongpas Widner) tending to soldiers who have succumbed to a sleeping sickness in a remote Thai city. Like many of Apichatpong's previous films, it conjures a present haunted by the past and did so with some of the festival's most enchanting imagery; hypnotic, neon-tinged nocturnal landscapes in particular. The cemetery of the title is one of ancient kings rumoured to lie under the hospital building. In one of the film's most striking scenes, it is mapped out in words in the hospital's overgrown garden by a psychic whom Jenjira befriends and who provides the film's delightfully comic moments, reading the thoughts and dreams of the soldiers to their loved ones.

The director who enacted the most wholehearted revision of his habitual mode of filmmaking was Jia Zhangke. **Mountains May Depart** tackles the same subject as many of his previous films – the momentous overhaul of Chinese society – and it contains some of the fantastical flourishes he is so well known for. But probably no one at Cannes anticipated a roving, futurist melodrama following four characters' thwarted search for home and happiness, told with a rousing string soundtrack and occasionally very conventional shot-reverse-shot camerawork (the startling landscape vistas of the northern mining town setting are the exception), all launched by an aerobics class jiggling to Pet Shop Boys' 'Go West'. It is a



Girlhood: Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang* explores female repression in Turkey

three-act film spanning a quarter of a century, with each time-jump – from 1999 to 2014 to 2025 – signalled by a different aspect ratio. The film's anchor is Zhao Tao's aerobics instructor turned lonely bourgeois mother, first the object of obsession, then embroiled in a bitter divorce. The final, stilted futuristic Melbourne-set chapter, concerning her estranged teenage son, is the film's one disappointment, but when the focus returns to Zhao it is a potent, melancholy story of money-obsession and fractured relationships.

Another family drama in the Competition – Koreeda Hirokazu's **My Little Sister** – isn't a daring departure for its director, but the saga

*Why aren't jury deliberations, like backroom government conversations, released to the public after a number of years?*



Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights*

about four sisters who live together in a coastal town and take in their teenage half-sister beautifully showcases Koreeda's Ozu-indebted formal delicacy and his aptitude for depicting everyday life and family dynamics. Its unabashed sentimentality, which many critics took issue with, actually makes the makeshift family utopia built by the sisters (soon, one fears, to disappear) all the more affecting. However, despite the loneliness and resentment lurking beneath many of the exchanges in the film, one abrupt farewell aside, *My Little Sister* never quite musters the potent sadness that haunts Koreeda's best work. It was, though, one of many female-centric films in Competition, a small consolation in the absence of any astounding films by the mere two female directors selected to compete for the Palme. One of the sad facts about this year's Cannes was that people were talking about flat shoes and the festival's antiquated, restrictive notion of female glamour, and not great female-directed films.

Melodrama had a firm hold on the Competition but the Cannes jury didn't treat it kindly. (Why aren't jury deliberations, like backroom government conversations, released to the public after a number of years?). Sadly, it was not Zhao or one of Koreeda's actresses but Emmanuelle Bercot who shared half of the Best Actress prize for her turn in *Maiwenn's* histrionic, faintly ludicrous and, by the end, utterly vacant portrait of a rotten, destructive relationship. **Mon roi** is a melodrama that degenerates into an acting battle, with Bercot's unbelievable lawyer competing for the audience's pity with howls and cries just as Vincent Cassel supposedly charms them with his garrulous scoundrel routine as her possessive ex-lover.

Rooney Mara received the other half of the prize for Todd Haynes's **Carol**, which deserved more, particularly having waited 63 years for



an adaptation while Patricia Highsmith's other indelible characters, like Tom Ripley, have long proved catnip to filmmakers from Alfred Hitchcock to Wim Wenders. *Carol* is a tender, devastating romance between Mara's wide-eyed shop assistant Therese and Cate Blanchett's Carol, an elegant socialite and mother with everything to lose. Haynes's previous visually exquisite explorations of a repressed and rotten America in the 1950s, in *Far from Heaven* (2002) and the HBO series *Mildred Pierce* (2011), occasionally felt like intellectual homages to the brooding worlds of Edward Hopper and Saul Leiter, and the melodramas and their makers, such as Douglas Sirk, who inspired him. Their influences are still on show here but this is the film where he steps out of their shadow. Surveying a battleground of power and control, Haynes knows all too well the potency of gesture and delivers some of his most devastating scenes in close-up: a possessive hand placed on a shoulder, a finger inching towards a phone's hang-up button, and, most of all, the eyes of Carol and Therese, full of longing, staring out of car windows.

Many of the most imaginative films in the festival turned out to be intimate romances from veteran filmmakers. Two French masters – Arnaud Desplechin and Philippe Garrel – with talkative stories of young love, found their way to Directors' Fortnight (which collected a roster of films to trounce Un Certain Regard's selection and certainly challenge the hallowed Competition). Garrel's *In the Shadow of Women* is everything *Mon roi* seeks to be but isn't, covering a similar battle-of-the-sexes theme with its investigation of infidelity and a self-obsessed male ego. The scenes of a disintegrating relationship have real bite and the love triangle's characters are acutely drawn. It also possesses one of the most touching finales seen at the festival.

Arnaud Desplechin's *My Golden Days* is, though, the stand-out of the two. A companion piece to his 1996 film *My Sex Life... or How I Got into an Argument*, it looks back to the formative years of that film's twentysomething academic Paul Dedalus (played, as in the original film, by Mathieu Amalric, with a magnetic Quentin Dolmaire portraying the character's teenage self) and his fledgling relationship with siren Esther (Lou Roy-Lecollinet). In its digressive narrative,



Love's labour's lost: Gaspar Noé's *Love*

Desplechin balances thrills, unexpected humour and psychological unease. His film is far from just a charming nostalgia trip, showcasing a multitude of cinematic tricks (from a recurring iris effect to actors addressing the camera), but one that always makes sure to sketch emotions sincerely.

The same could not be said of Gaspar Noé's *Love*, even though it's an ambition of the film's wannabe director protagonist – and Noé-cipher – Murphy (Karl Glusman) to “truly depict sentimental sexuality” on film. Emotion in Noé-land amounts to repetitious bouts of self-pity, with Murphy rallying against his current domestic entrapment and lamenting

*The only really commendable feature in Gaspar Noé's rather self-indulgent mess, 'Love', is the cinematography*

lost love Electra (Aomi Muyock) in voiceover. The only really commendable feature (and note of restraint) in this rather self-indulgent mess is *Love*'s cinematography, with tangles of intricately composed bodies shot from overhead and marked by a steamy, luminous palette (the work of Noé's regular DP Benoît Debie, who recently made *Spring Breakers* look so surreal). Last year, in this same Cannes theatre, Jean-Luc Godard expanded 3D's repertoire – but Noé's film hardly puts the technology to use at all. The ejaculation climax of the opening scene received a bout of riotous applause at the midnight screening (though it still didn't match the most thunderous mid-film applause I heard in the hallowed Lumière, which simultaneously saluted and decried a beautiful digital glitch during Jia Zhangke's film). It was all too telling that by the time a close-up making use of 3D's audience-splattering capabilities arrived, the response was muted in a theatre already lulled into boredom. ☹



Jia Zhangke's *Mountains May Depart*



Philippe Garrel's *In the Shadow of Women*



# RARE GENIUS: THE OTHER SIDE OF ORSON WELLES


*With all that has been written about the great director, it might sometimes feel as if there's nothing new to say about him, but the restless polymath left such a vast body of work it's still possible to find underappreciated gems – from his recently rediscovered first professional film outing to a 1950s TV travelogue series to his late unfinished opus 'The Other Side of the Wind'*

**By Ben Walters**

**Not long after Orson Welles's death** in 1985, Jonathan Rosenbaum argued that “the legacy he left behind – a wealth of material including countless films, scripts and projects, scattered over many years and countries, in different stages of completion or realization – is immeasurably larger and richer, and more full of potential surprises, than any of us had reason to suspect”.

Three decades on, in the centenary year of Welles's birth, we know just how accurate that insight was. In life Welles contained multitudes: director, actor, producer, writer, sage, showman, monster, magician, inspiration, cautionary tale. He was renowned both for his achievements (*Citizen Kane*, *Touch of Evil*, *F for Fake*... you know

the titles) and for the ones that got away; for showing the world how movies ought to be made, then somehow losing his own path. His place in the pantheon is secure – *Kane's* position for a half a century from 1962 atop this magazine's Greatest Films of All Time poll played a part in that – yet there is still so much about his work that remains unknown or underappreciated.

So with a cheerful disregard for settled opinion of which Welles might have approved, let's look at three projects from the beginning, middle and end of his career – projects that expand our understanding of his genius yet will be unfamiliar to many who love his work – and raise a half-full glass to rediscoveries still to come. 

**A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS**  
In life, Orson Welles (right) contained multitudes: director, actor, producer, writer, sage, showman, monster, magician, inspiration and cautionary tale







## TOO MUCH JOHNSON



It was always a crucial part of the popular Welles legend that the creator of *Citizen Kane* was a cinematic ingénue, a newcomer to both the industry and the medium who simply hit the ground running. And it's true that Welles had kept his distance from the studios: he turned down various acting roles and even a gig heading up David O. Selznick's script department before landing that golden ticket with RKO in July 1939, the contract that gave an untried 24-year-old the power to write, produce, direct and star in two features.

So, yes, Welles was new to Hollywood. But he wasn't, in fact, new to filmmaking. As a teenager, he had experimented with putting theatre on screen, shooting scenes from a youthful stage production of *Twelfth Night* with a static camera; and also with more overtly cinematic forms, co-directing as a lark a silent single-reeler called *The Hearts of Age*, a witty and grotesque pastiche of surrealist and expressionist tropes. His most tantalising celluloid experiment, however, drew its inspiration instead from Mack Sennett-style silent comedy.

Shot in 1938, the ten 35mm nitrate reels of *Too Much Johnson* represent Welles's first professional moves into filmmaking. At 23, he was already one of the United States' most renowned theatre directors, having taken Manhattan by storm with his 'voodoo' *Macbeth*, fascist *Julius Caesar* and controversial leftist musical *The Cradle Will Rock*. But Welles always liked a varied aesthetic diet and for his latest production he turned to an 1894 farce called *Too Much Johnson*, a convoluted concoction in which Welles's regular collaborator Joseph Cotten would star as a

man whose lover's incandescent husband pursues him to a Cuban plantation.

Perhaps inspired by the earliest days of cinema, when shorts were habitually programmed alongside live turns within variety bills, Welles hit upon the idea of amalgamating the production's live action with cinema. Not simple, quick inserts, mind you: the plan was for a full 40 minutes of filmed material, starting with a lengthy prologue covering our hero's dalliance with his lover, her husband's discovery of them, and the subsequent madcap and increasingly populous chase through the streets and parks – and across the rooftops – of Manhattan that leads to the port where the boat to Cuba lies. Later interludes, filmed upstate in a quarry dressed with a couple of potted palm trees to resemble Cuba, included a visit to a cemetery, a cliff-top duel and a scrap in a pond.

Long thought lost, this material turned up in storage in Italy in 2008 and proved revelatory. In both theatre and radio, Welles had already demonstrated that his genius lay in two particular facets: first, his knack for galvanising a crew of talented collaborators to push themselves to new levels of invention under his leadership; and second, his uncanny ability both to perceive the distinctive formal attributes unique to a particular medium and to intuit the most effective technical means of expressing them. In other words, what's so striking about the *Too Much Johnson* footage is that it shows Welles thinking as a filmmaker from the start – not recording a stage play but doing things that can only be done with a camera.

One obvious expression of this is the evident delight taken in shooting on location.







The early action spreads boisterously across a plethora of architecturally distinctive lower Manhattan sites, some identifiable by street signs. Characters are forever skidding round corners and clambering in and out of windows – indeed the rooftop scenes are the most striking of all, with Cotten giving Harold Lloyd a run for his money, dangling off the edges of buildings while swinging a ladder. The ‘Cuban’ scenes, meanwhile, have a powerful sense of scale, even grandeur, as characters scale cliffsides and scabble across quarry sites.

It wasn’t just the choice of locations: it was the way Welles (working with Pathé news cameraman Paul Dunbar) photographed them. His basic sense of film grammar – close-ups, midshots etc – is plain, but his sophisticated visual aesthetic is no less evident. The footage is replete with images one could call quintessentially Wellesian: gorgeous shots of ship’s rigging against a moody sky; a character in jeopardy as geometric architecture looms overhead; a spider-web of washing lines or double helix

#### BALANCING ACT

**The ten reels of *Too Much Johnson*, which were filmed to accompany a play in 1938, were thought lost until they were rediscovered in Italy in 2008**

of adjacent fire escapes; a suffragette march framed by the splayed legs of standing male observers. Action takes place on multiple planes, resulting in a potent depth of field and there’s a pronounced interest in the vertical – indeed the vertiginous – in the shape not only of rooftop and clifftop pursuits but the use of overhead perspectives of a kind quite unavailable to a theatre director. A pursuit through teetering piles of market crates anticipates in slapstick Xanadu’s packing cases in *Kane*.

*Too Much Johnson* was also where Welles truly fell in love with editing. Working on the material in his hotel suite while

*Joseph Cotten gives Harold Lloyd a run for his money, dangling off buildings while swinging a ladder*

simultaneously trying to rehearse the stage elements of the production (and develop a high-profile new radio drama to boot), he reportedly became so absorbed in the process he didn’t bother to leave the room when some film caught fire. He more or less completed some sequences, which again show not just a familiarity with conventions – from cross-cutting to trick effects such as jump-cuts and invisible cuts – but also an interest in Eisensteinian montage.

But this footage never reached audiences in 1938. There were questions over film rights to the material and the technical facilities of the Connecticut theatre where the production was to debut. There was also the fact of having so much to do in so little time. Whatever the facts of the case, the filmed material remained unseen and the stage production never reached New York. Welles’s first professional cinematic venture was also his first unfinished film. No matter. A couple of months later, his broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* made the front pages. And soon after that, the offers from Hollywood got serious.





## AROUND THE WORLD WITH ORSON WELLES



**The Hollywood offers** that followed *The War of The Worlds* eventually yielded *Kane*, which proved more strange, more wonderful and more of a headache than RKO had imagined. Then followed the slow professional falling off of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), the abortive *It's All True* from 1941, *The Stranger* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), *Macbeth* (1948) and *Othello* (1952) – all undertakings of unique invention, charm, imagination and vision, all contributing in one way or another to the story of Orson Welles the fallen idol, the maverick, the liability. Welles was no less smitten with filmmaking – and the success of *The Third Man* (1949) had affirmed his international celebrity status – but the industry was out of love with him as a director.

By the early 1950s, he had his eye on another medium. Television had piqued Welles's curiosity at the end of the war but he had been living in Europe throughout the period of its cultural ascendancy in the US. In 1953, Peter Brook invited him back to America to play King Lear for a CBS special and Welles was hooked. His own ideas for TV, however, were less theatrical.



Here, he realised, was a platform that was closer to radio than cinema: a domestic, conversational medium ideal for the kind of conspiratorial storytelling that had always been his preferred mode.

His breakthrough came in 1955, when the BBC's Huw Wheldon offered six 15-minute slots in which Welles would simply chat to the camera about a range of interests, from acting to politics to autocues, pausing occasionally to show off a drawing on the subject at hand. *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* was first-person, one-to-one TV, the closest most of us would ever get to dining with Welles: casual and intimate, it anticipated the small-screen interpersonal rendezvous of YouTube and Skype by half a century.

The new commercial network ITV took notice: its London franchise, Associated Rediffusion, signed Welles up to deliver 26 travelogues for a show that would be known as *Around the World with Orson Welles*. The format built on the sophisticated, worldly and solicitous persona that Welles ("your obedient servant") had crafted as host of various radio shows during which he introduced viewers to some of his favourite people and places – but it would also give him the opportunity to develop a distinctive, discursive visual grammar with which to illustrate his essayistic adventures.

So here he was in Vienna, hearing about the decline of traditional café culture under the onslaught of the espresso and watching the pastry for apple strudel being teased out in great sheets; or in Paris, talking to the idiosyncratic artist Raymond Duncan and lamenting American conformism; or the Basque country, learning about the local ball game of *pelota* and the benefits of open



borders; or in London, talking to Chelsea pensioners and widows in a Hackney almshouse about age and dignity. There was controversy too: an episode shot in Madrid that centred on a bullfight provoked consternation in the British press, and another shot in Lurs in northern France, investigating the notorious recent murder of a holidaying British family, aroused local anger and remained untransmitted.

The programme's tone was inquisitive, courteous and romantic, combining epicurean enthusiasm with subtly progressive bite. Just as compelling was the form. In storytelling mode, Welles went out of his way to advertise the mechanics of the medium, typically beginning a segment with, "Now let's take the camera over here for a minute," and frequently including shots of his own handheld Cineflex. As well as deliberately including his shoulder and ear in the frame to establish his presence with an interviewee, Welles developed an innovative and sophisticated dynamic of simulated eye contact, using cutaways (often shot at a later date) to create conversational links between himself, his subject and, through the camera, the viewer at home. Other novel approaches included the use of synchronised sound for location shooting and handheld footage to simulate a panicked flight.

It all testified to Welles's desire to bring the world into the audience's home as evocatively and empathetically as possible; he probably wasn't joking when he noted in a Viennese kitchen: "If television were improved, we ought to be able to broadcast some of these marvellous odours." Media controversy wasn't the only off-screen hitch,



#### FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**The tone of *Around the World with Orson Welles* was inquisitive, courteous and romantic, combining epicurean enthusiasm with subtly progressive bite**

however. Welles's commitment to the project dropped off long before the delivery of 26 episodes; indeed, not all of those filmed were completed, with the producers obliged to add stock footage to pad out the Paris show and bring in Kenneth Tynan and his wife Elaine Dundy as narrators for the Madrid episode.

But Welles's engagement with the medium remained passionate and sincere. A year later, he took his televisual storytelling mode up a notch, adding rear-projected still photos, on-set scenery changes and tricksy

lip-synching techniques for 'The Fountain of Youth', the bravura pilot for a dramatic series that never found a backer. Other such attempts notwithstanding, Welles never found a creative foothold in the industry – though paid work on voiceovers, adverts and talk shows were plentiful. That distinctive new formal grammar, however, with its knowing, expansive tone and playful use of montage, would eventually find both fuller expression and critical appreciation. That happened when Welles applied it to a later project that began life as a piece for television but was eventually expanded into a feature and released under the title *F for Fake* (1973).



*TV offered a domestic, conversational medium ideal for the kind of conspiratorial storytelling that had always been his preferred mode*





## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND



Welles returned to the US in 1956 and embarked on ventures he hoped would revive his relationships with New York theatre and Hollywood filmmaking. In both cases – a disastrous *King Lear* at City Center and *Touch of Evil* for Universal – they proved to mark the end of the affair. His careers on the mainstream American stage and screen were done. Relocating once again to Europe, he continued to create new work on his own terms, under the circumstances at hand: *The Trial* (1962), *Chimes at Midnight* (1966) and *The Immortal Story* (1968) all demonstrated his ability to cut his coat according to his cloth with unmistakably Wellesian results.

While filming *The Trial* in Croatia in 1962, Welles met the person with whom he would form the most enduring partnership of his later years. Oja Kodar was a young writer, actress and artist who became Welles's lover and creative collaborator, and relocated to the US with him in the late 1960s. There they met the young cameraman Gary Graver, recently back from Vietnam, whose dedication to facilitating Welles's work would prove no less dedicated than Kodar's over the next 15 years.

In August 1970, they started work on the project that would become the best known of the many productions left unfinished when Welles died. *The Other Side of the Wind* was centred around a teasingly self-



## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Welles filming *The Other Side of the Wind* (above); with John Huston and Peter Bogdanovich (below); and with cameraman Gary Graver (right)

reflexive concept. It was the story of Jake Hannaford, an American filmmaker – iconic, charismatic and mercurial but out of favour, rumoured to be washed up – who returns from exile in Europe to make a new picture conceived to give the New Wave and new Hollywood upstarts a run for their money.

Welles's film would focus on the events around Hannaford's 70th birthday party, culminating in his death at the wheel of the sports car he intended as a gift for his young male star. These events were to be filmed in a mixture of formats (35mm, 16mm, Super 8, colour, and black and white) and intercut with excerpts from Hannaford's own picture, also called *The Other Side of the Wind*. Both modes offered opportunities to satirise aspects of contemporary cinema culture. Hannaford's picture was a gorgeous, pretentious pastiche of Antonioni-style avant-garde ennui while the party was to be a cacophonous, barbed shindig populated by thinly veiled versions of contemporary film-world personalities, from the Maysles brothers and Marlene Dietrich to Welles-sceptical critics such as Charles Higham and Pauline Kael. Dennis Hopper played himself and Welles's protégé Peter Bogdanovich did the same in all but name. Some way into production, John Huston agreed to take the main role.

Hannaford himself plainly overlapped with Welles in many ways, from the contours of his career to such particulars as a fondness for Spain and cigars. Yet in other ways they were antithetical: Hannaford was macho in ways Welles had never indulged, and the character's sense of self and art were more fragile and contingent than



his creator's. In other words, Welles was subjecting himself to the kind of is-he-isn't-he treatment that he had applied to William Randolph Hearst three decades earlier.

*The Other Side of the Wind* was evocative of *Citizen Kane* in other ways too. Both took a boldly refracted formal approach, using the testimony of a shifting roster of acquaintances – and, in the later picture, a dizzying variety of recording technologies – to explore an ultimately elusive central figure. In both films, that elusiveness was literally inscribed on the screen: interlopers seeking access to Kane's compound are presented with a sign reading 'No Trespassing', while viewers trying to watch Hannaford's final project are confronted with a holding card saying 'Scene Missing'.

Hannaford was struggling to find completion funds for his film, a situation in which Welles found himself too: the studio system had radically changed yet he seemed no better able to navigate the new Hollywood than the old. He kept shooting for years, then years more passed as the terms of post-production and the legal status of the footage became mired in querulous negotiations that continued until Welles's death in 1985. Since then, half a dozen attempts to broker deals between the various interested parties have come and gone (they're detailed in Josh Karp's new book about the picture, *Orson Welles's Last Movie*). The day after the centenary of Welles's birth in May, an online crowdfunding project launched, supported by most of the key players, with the aim of raising \$2 million to complete the picture.

The neatness of the idea of an unfinished movie about an unfinished movie is part of what inspires the project's continued fascination for Welles-watchers. But there were other reasons too. For one thing, there were so many great yarns about the production, which involved imaginary midgets, illicit shoots on the old MGM lot and financial backing from a company associated with the Shah of Iran. For another, of all Welles's unfinished projects, *The Other Side of the Wind* seems to have been most tantalisingly close to completion at the time of his death.

Perhaps the main reason, though, is the awe with which so many who took part in the film's production and post-production have reported Welles's artistic approach, speaking of a radical expressive departure executed with intuitive technical brilliance. We won't know whether such claims are justified unless the latest completion attempt or one of its successors bears fruit. Until then, we can only echo the words used by one of Hannaford's collaborators when a studio producer questions his ability to spin gold from chaos: "He's done it before." 🍷



*Of all Welles's unfinished projects, 'The Other Side of the Wind' seems to have been most tantalisingly close to completion*

**i** *Too Much Johnson* and *Around the World with Orson Welles* will screen as part of 'Orson Welles: The Great Disruptor' at BFI Southbank, London, in July and August. Ben Walters will give a talk about Welles's TV work as part of the season. *Touch of Evil* is rereleased by the BFI in UK cinemas on 10 July. *The Third Man* is rereleased in UK cinemas by StudioCanal on 26 June. *Too Much Johnson*, *The Immortal Story* and *Chimes at Midnight* are all released on DVD and Blu-ray by Mr Bongo on 29 June. *Around the World with Orson Welles* and the new documentary *Magician: The Astonishing Life & Work of Orson Welles* are out on DVD and Blu-ray from the BFI in August. Josh Karp's *Orson Welles's Last Movie* is out now from St. Martin's Press. Further details of the crowdfunding appeal for *The Other Side of the Wind* can be found at [www.orsonslastfilm.com](http://www.orsonslastfilm.com)



# LOST SOUL

*'Amy', Asif Kapadia's heartbreaking documentary about Amy Winehouse, employs a similar style to 'Senna', his 2010 portrait of racing legend Ayrton Senna, to present a complex picture of someone who is both more canny and more intimidated than we could ever have imagined*

**By Nick James**



**THE JAZZ SINGER**  
'I was asked to do this film,' says Asif Kapadia (above) about *Amy*, his portrait of Amy Winehouse (right). 'I didn't make it to get at anyone. I believe it's a faithful portrait of this incredible girl and what happened to her'

The scene is some ordinary flat-pack London lounge at the turn of this century. A petite but gawky teenaged girl with flappy fingers – all fidgety overspill – is eyeballing the lens of a videocam; there's insistence and pleading in those eyes. "You're a good-looking fella," she tells the guy filming her, while her eyes say, "Love me, you will love me." Big teeth flash between frosted lips as she moves right in. She can seem a little vacant, this girl, keeping up the speed chat like she's mimicking Matt Lucas's Vicky Pollard, but don't be fooled: this persistent, slightly irritating but captivating youth has a mind that's fine-tuned for fleeting moods and images and she will become perhaps the most talented female singer and lyricist of her generation.

In his bio-documentary *Amy*, it's the phenomenal talent of Winehouse that's the first thing director Asif Kapadia sets out to establish. We see her performing right from the start: jazz in 2000 with the National Youth Jazz Orchestra, jazzy songs of her own. Her astonishing voice – what *Rolling Stone* called her "sultry, crackly, world-weary howl" – already has power, edge, intimacy and great flexibility, and her emotions are always close to the surface so that her vocals never sound like an acquired technique. Purists might balk at a North London Jewish girl channelling Sarah Vaughan and Dinah Washington, but absorbing and adapting African-American music is, of course, what young Brits have been doing since before the Stones and Dusty Springfield. As these performances demonstrate, Amy Winehouse always sounded most of all like herself.

But starting a film with excerpts of torch songs is a risky strategy. After all, what Winehouse is most famous for – however regrettably – is not her way with phrasing but her tortuous descent into drink and drug addiction, much of which took place under the flashgun barrage of the paparazzi. Loosely speaking, the career arc goes like this: quickly making a name for herself as a phenomenal vocalist and a songwriter, but also as a style icon who melded the Bettie Page pin-up look her generation favoured with Ronnie Spector's beehive and makeup, Winehouse is taken on by Island Records and,

in 2003, Salaam Remi produces the *Frank* album, which gets her noticed on the British scene and is nominated for a Mercury Prize. Around this time, she falls completely in love with London scenester Blake Fielder-Civil, and they both set out on a path of mutual self-destruction through heroin and booze.

But let's pause that tale for a moment, because perhaps the first shock of *Amy* is to discover that Winehouse's need to get wasted all the time was there long before she achieved real fame. Her appetite for life, for being in the heightened moment, seemed impossible to turn off. That's one reason why Kapadia had first to front up her raw talent and win us over to her as a person as well as a performer.

"What was really important for me," Kapadia tells me, "was to show this really talented young girl at her natural best, so we could see that what she was really about was being this incredible jazz singer, performing to small groups of people. She said quite early on that she never wanted to be really famous. When I started looking at all the material, I realised that her charisma, her presence, was a lot to do with her eyes, which are so amazing; all those moments when she's looking straight into the camera. You see that sweet, vulnerable girl hungry all the time for love. And her friends at the beginning, with their tiny cameras, are doing exactly what the paparazzi were doing towards the end, saying, 'Look this way Amy. Do this.'"

The rest of the Winehouse story may have a familiar shape, but not all your preconceptions about the girl will stand up (and your heart will be in danger of breaking). *Amy* has been constructed by Kapadia in a similar way to *Senna*, his 2010 portrait of Formula 1 racing driver Ayrton Senna, by gathering all the available footage he could lay his hands on. Kapadia says, "I used all kinds of material: people's stills; their playing around with little video cameras; concert films; phone cameras; everything. That's what you do. You take the imagery, just as a Scorsese does with a fiction film, and you speed bits up, slow other bits down, reframe, move in. You take a song like 'Back to Black', you see her learning it









with the lyric sheet and then her alone in the vocal booth doing it, just her voice, then you bring in the music – *bam* – and it's so powerful, and even more so if you then cut the music out again."

The *Back to Black* album, and particularly the single 'Rehab', with its famous lyric, "They tried to make me go to rehab/ I said, 'No, no, no.../I ain't got the time/ and if my daddy thinks I'm fine..." made Winehouse a huge international star. But the daddy in question, Amy's father Mitch Winehouse, does not think Kapadia's film is fine – unsurprising, since he does not come out of it well, although he fares better than Fielder-Civil or the paparazzi. Mitch Winehouse has said about the film that "there are specific allegations made against family and management that are unfounded and unbalanced". You'll have to make up your own minds about that.

Kapadia's defence of his film is straightforward. "I'm just a simple guy," he says. "I was asked to do this film. I didn't make the film to get at anyone. I believe it's a faithful portrait of this incredible girl and what happened to her. What we did is to talk to hundreds of people and build up a picture based on that. I was lucky that Amy's first manager Nick Shymansky was out with his girlfriend and he was just walking past the Coronet one day and he said, 'Senna – I've been wanting to see that film,' and his girlfriend wasn't too keen, but they went in and afterwards, he said to her, 'If anyone was to make a film about Amy, it would be great if it was like this.' And some time later, when I rang him, he told me that was the reason why he agreed to talk to me. I talked to him over several sessions in a darkened room, and it became like a chain of connections – you should talk to so-and-so, and in these sessions people would always end up in tears. With her close friends, in particular, it took me a long, long time to win their trust. At first I would say, 'I know nothing about this girl or what happened.' But over time I built up enough knowledge to begin to say, 'Hang on, it wasn't like that, was it?' One of the things about these sessions is that not one of them was there for the whole time, so they had all sorts of opinions about the people who came before or after them."

In the orgy of speculation that followed Winehouse's death from alcohol poisoning in July 2011, much mileage was made out of the fact that she had joined the so-called 27 Club of musicians who died at the age of 27, a group that also includes Robert Johnson, Janis Joplin, Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain. Cobain, of course, is the subject of a recently released documentary tribute of his own, *Cobain: Montage of Heck*, which tries to get to some essential truth about his disaffection with the world in ways that are similarly reliant on glimpses of his personal life and writings. *Montage of Heck* is, however, the more hagiographic work, made with full family co-operation and designed not to disturb the Cobain myth of a boy too sensitive for this world. *Amy* takes more risks, in that the film – which, through its very method, is a critique of the way tabloid digital media harass stars such as Winehouse – makes use of the very imagery it is critiquing, something Kapadia insists is totally justified.

*Amy* also allows you to judge the quality of Winehouse's lyrics for yourself, because they run across the screen every time she sings. "I wanted her words to be read and understood," says the director, "so you could see this incredibly talented young girl – she was just 20 when



*I wanted her words to be read and understood, so you could see this incredibly talented young girl was writing these amazing songs about what was happening to her*

she made *Frank* and 23 when she made *Back to Black* – was writing these amazing songs and they were about what was happening to her. Because when you're just listening, you just start tapping your feet and you're away with it. You just switch off. So I thought it was important to put the lyrics on screen, to show just what a brilliant songwriter she was. There wasn't really any music bi-doc that was in my mind. I was trying to think of it more as a musical. The one film I saw while I was making *Amy* and that made sense in a similar way was the Coen brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis*. Here is this guy living his life and every once in a while he sings."

And that's the Winehouse that emerges in *Amy*, someone much more canny and yet also much more intimidated than we could have imagined. Kapadia thinks pop success got in the way of her bohemian idea of artistry. "She was a jazz singer," he says. "She didn't want to play the same songs over and over. That was the strength of her as an artist coming through." The film gives us plenty of space to reflect on what might have been and much of its tragic power derives from a profound sense of a talent spent way too soon, so we don't just mourn for the bulimic, alcoholic junky in pain, but for the music, much of it rap-oriented, as well as jazz, that she never got to make.

For Kapadia, there's also something essentially London about the singer. "It's like everyone in London had a connection to Amy," he says. "They either knew her, knew someone who knew her, or saw her play or out on the streets. And when I was looking at all the material, I kept thinking: I know these streets, I've walked through these parts of London." This journalist can only agree. One evening in 2004, I was about to leave my local N16 gastropub – a well-liked but never crowded establishment – when I noticed the place was filling up mysteriously with dapper blokes in their early thirties. There must have been at least 40 of them. They milled around, as if checking out the place; then, just at the moment my family and I were heading for the door, the men formed a corridor, and towards us, moving not unlike a flamingo, came tiny Amy Winehouse, looking sassier than I had ever imagined. We stepped aside and I resisted the impulse to bow. *Amy* is that bow, a film full of love and anger. **S**

**MUSICAL YOUTH**  
Asif Kapadia's film builds its portrait of Amy Winehouse (above) through an eclectic array of visual material, including stills, video camera images, concert films and phone camera footage



**Amy is released in UK cinemas on 3 July and is reviewed on page 62**



**"AN ICE COLD KNOCKOUT...  
BRILLIANTLY PERCEPTIVE AND FROSTILY FUNNY"**

Aaron Hillis, Village Voice



The Guardian



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# THE ATROCITY EXHIBITION

*While Joshua Oppenheimer's 'The Act of Killing' explored the savagery of the Indonesian massacres of 1965-66 from the perspective of its unrepentant perpetrators, his confrontational new documentary 'The Look of Silence' examines the experience of its victims*

**By Nick Bradshaw**



"One of the most persistent complaints among officials in Washington is that our political troubles in Vietnam are not balanced adequately by reports in the press of the more hopeful political developments elsewhere in Asia."

"The savage transformation of Indonesia from a pro-Chinese policy under Sukarno to a defiantly anti-Communist policy under General Suharto is, of course, the most important of these developments. Washington is careful not to claim any credit for this change in the sixth most populous and one of the richest nations in the world, but this does not mean that Washington had nothing to do with it..."

James Reston, 'A gleam of light in Asia', *New York Times*, 19 June 1966

Early on in Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence*, there's a clip from the NBC News archives that strikes much the same note of eerie shamelessness and chauvinism as the above celebration of CIA-marshalled genocide – one of the rare contemporaneous acknowledgements in the Western media of the bloodbath that in the space of a year destroyed not only the world's largest peaceful communist movement but also all fellow-travelling indigenous nationalist and progressive groups. Watching Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), in which the executioners' ambiguous dramatisations of their own legends provided layers of exposé, testimony, vainglory and confession, you could adjudge some of the local motives for this feat of carnage from the polity built upon it – depicted as a neoliberal free zone of greed, corruption and vacuous consumerism – as well as from the brute bloodlust and power plays that the film's protagonists couldn't decide whether to hide or flaunt. (Recurring eulogies to the enterprising muscle of self-made gangsters seemed to encapsulate the whole Swiftian vision.) Likewise, *The Look of Silence's* news report shows us the uses of crushed Reds and disabbling natives to the putsch's international sponsors: we see once-unionised workers in the Goodyear Company's Sumatran rubber "empire" who since the coup "still work the rubber – but this time as prisoners, and at gunpoint". (Political prisoners on other islands in the Indonesian archipelago meet various fates, continues the reporter blithely: "In some camps they are starved to death – or released periodically to be killed by the local citizens.")

The other archive footage we see in *The Look of Silence* is Oppenheimer's own, and dates from the (pre-HD video) era that he has previously described in interviews about the genesis of *The Act of Killing*. Having helped Indonesian plantation workers to make *The Globalisation Tapes* (2003), an irreverent bottom-up unmasking of the corporate world order, Oppenheimer was trying to make his

own documentary about the state of fear that still prevailed among the families of victims of the mass murder, principally in the north Sumatran capital, Medan. These families had found that expressing themselves on camera was considered dangerously subversive, even 40 years after the purges; but during this process Oppenheimer came across the first of the giggling killers, eager to divulge their crimes, who would eventually lead him to Anwar Congo and his fellow protagonists in *The Act of Killing*. In this case the standard-def images show us two men, Amir Hasan and Inong Sungai Ular, leading us down to Snake River, where they used to dispose of bodies by night at the army's behest, re-enacting their favoured means of dismembering a man, and reminiscing about one particularly recalcitrant victim, called Ramli, who took extra work to finish off. (At the end of the scene, they pose for a photo and make a V sign, an image Oppenheimer would soon see echoed in photos of American soldiers at Abu Ghraib.)

Ramli's murder, in fact, was one of the most notorious in the entire region because of its undeniable visibility: rather than follow his fellows quietly into the waters, he'd managed to escape and crawl home wounded, only to be prised away again from his family by his killers and left for dead at daybreak in a creek; he was finally dispatched after passersby reported his continuing cries for help. Ramli was the never-known elder brother of a friend of Oppenheimer's, Adi, who seems to have been raised by his traumatised parents explicitly as a replacement for their lost first-born, and whose steely determination to look his brother's killers in the eye and ask for the truth provides *The Look of Silence* with its structure. (Adi is an ophthalmologist, which provides him a way in to conversations with the old guard; this and his impassive studies of Oppenheimer's videos also provide the film with its ocular motif.) For those riled by the moral compromises and complicities intrinsic



**THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES**  
*The Look of Silence*, directed by Joshua Oppenheimer (above), focuses on his friend Adi (left), an ophthalmologist seeking answers from the death squad members who killed his brother Ramli during the Indonesian mass killings of the mid-60s



to *The Act of Killing*'s collaborative mode of engaging the killers' cinematic voices, *The Look of Silence* – which Oppenheimer calls a “companion film” – may be an easier watch, with its more confrontational style. If *Killing* was a Boschian landscape of moral squalor and damnation, *Silence* is a more streamlined dystopian foray; it's tempting to call it Kafkaesque, although perhaps no one should be surprised at the very human denials, rationalisations and threats that Adi and Oppenheimer encounter in their visits to the sanctums of the powerful. “You ask too many questions,” warns Adi's first interviewee. “Why are you asking me these questions? Are you trying to make me angry?” splutters Inong, adding: “I know what you're doing. Your questions are too deep. I don't like deep questions.” “Forget the past. Let's all get along like the military dictatorship taught us to,” Amir Hasan's family beseech. “Maybe what you're trying to do now is secret communist activity. Keep going...” a death-squad leader says, narrowing his eyes menacingly when his initial boasts have turned to disavowal and excuses after Adi has revealed his identity. M.Y. Basrun, now in his fifth decade as speaker of the regional legislature, lays it on the line: “Do the victims' families want the killings to happen again? Then change! If you keep making an issue of the past – it will definitely happen again.”

Of course, it's a lot to expect those still enjoying the fruits of their crimes to offer truth and reconciliation on the spot – that, as examples from South Africa to Rwanda suggest, requires a society-wide power shift and social commissions. But what Oppenheimer's dance with the doorstepping, gotcha format does is dramatise the bald need for all of that, and the prevailing conditions of terror and injustice that preclude any hope of democratic salvation for the country's trauma.

Meanwhile, cinephiles from here to Medan may be put in mind of that vigilante-thriller movie mode (think *Bad Day at Black Rock*, *High Plains Drifter* or *The Bride Wore Black*) in which a mysterious figure emerges to exact retribution or otherwise clear the fog of guilt and impunity. Certainly the fears voiced by Anwar and co in *The Act of Killing* – that given half a chance the families of their victims would seek revenge – resurface here in the words and expressions of Adi's interlocutors, who we may discern are prisoners of the past as much as Adi's anguished parents. Their bewilderment and panic in the face of Adi's preternatural dignity and poise – neither cowed nor threatening – suggests the dictatorship may not have done such a good job of teaching them all to get along.

As for Adi's own safety, Oppenheimer says he initially resisted his friend's proposal to conduct and document these encounters because it seemed too dangerous. He describes the precautions they took for each visit – IDs hidden, multiple getaway cars, passports at the ready; but, as in *The Act of Killing*, his status as an outsider and an American was clearly the catalyst for the entire process. If these are the “love letters to Indonesia” he has called them, they're of the scorched-earth variety. Oppenheimer left the country for good after he'd shot the material for *Silence* and before the release of *Killing* in 2012; Adi and his family had to relocate to another part of the country, supposedly safely embedded within a community of human-rights campaigners who could look after them. He's the only ‘victim’ with any agency we meet in either film; we can only hope that – or investigate for ourselves

the degree to which – his crusade mirrors the work of multiple campaigners who are throwing off the yoke of fear, or a younger generation determined to clear the air.

Certainly Oppenheimer conjures a sense of something bubbling up. “The film is constructed as a kind of poem about memory – as opposed to a political thriller documenting these confrontations between Adi and these threatening perpetrators,” he tells me. The intimations of revenge drama may be a red herring, but the return-of-the-repressed atmospherics are apt. Glows of light leak through the clapboards of Adi's family home at dusk. Inong blinks and twitches uncontrollably while sitting for an eye test, not unlike Anwar's bodily eruptions at the end of *The Act of Killing*. Adi's young children play with magic jumping beans, when they're not getting correctives from their father to the gruesome propaganda they're fed at school about the events of 1965-66. Early in Oppenheimer's time in Indonesia he'd been put in mind of the company slaughter of striking workers in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – “The massacre that just makes sense of everything you'd read up until the point that it's spoken about; the vortex around which the whole book swirls. Magical realism is perhaps the only genre for dealing with atrocity in the context of total impunity,” he opines – “because of the sorcery and magic that becomes inevitable when you have repression and horror.”

Abstraction and recomposition were the methods informing the film's soundtrack, too. “The main project was somehow to show what this silence [of the title] looks like and to show this is not a peaceful silence, this is a silence constituted through this swarming of unspoken ghosts and pain. I was trying to think what filmmakers for me are masters of silence and really understand how to create moments where apparently nothing is happening but actually enormous pain and unspoken grief and mystery are all in delicate, intense equilibrium, so I made Ozu and Bresson my guides. They're not necessarily the two filmmakers I look to most often, but I really made a study of some of their films before shooting and editing.” For landscapes that needed ‘re-haunting’, Oppenheimer and his sound editor Henrik Garnov built up varying choruses of crickets; the encounter with Inong thrums with the same “shrieking insect” – Oppenheimer's term – heard in several freighted scenes in *The Act of Killing*.



**OUT OF THE PAST**  
Adi and Ramli's mother Rohani (above); and one of the film's murderers, with his daughter (below), after he has divulged details of the terror and brutality on which his heroic reputation rests







“And in all the confrontations – this is something a more journalistic documentary would never do – we cleaned out all the diegetic sounds, the passing cars and motorcycles, and only put in what germane sounds we wanted to evoke a kind of awareness of the outside world. It means the dialogue is at normal levels, but the spaces in which people are speaking have a silence you would normally only hear in a fiction film. And there were ten weeks of sound editing and four weeks mixing, which is what you would have on a fiction film, never on a documentary.”

Oppenheimer has been criticised by some for this emotive approach, and for his diptych's dearth of political and historical contextualisation. “It would have been wonderful if sufficiently definitive evidence had already been declassified that we could have worked that in without distracting from the overall arc, the grammar and emotional experience of the film,” he says. “But [the danger of] a historical analysis about the political forces that were at play in the Cold War would make this a film about the past and take away from those aspects in which the film is about the moral disaster of the present.

“In fact,” he adds, “there has been a number of competent and detailed historical films made about 1965, but they haven't made the impact because they haven't subverted the function of the lie told in 1965, whereas *The Act*

*of Killing* in particular exposed the lie as a lie. Somebody at a screening said to me recently, ‘It's as though you pulled back the curtain to reveal a nightmare that was there but no one was looking at.’ To which I answered, ‘No, I actually think they wouldn't have made the impact if they'd simply pulled back the curtain and revealed this awful situation. They've made the impact they have by revealing that the curtain is part of the nightmare.’ Campaigning films [for instance] will invariably confront a lie head on and say, ‘This is a lie,’ but they won't show the workings, the mechanisms of a lie. And that is bound to have less impact than deconstructing the lie itself so people can see how it works – and then the lie no longer works.

“But going back to the main point – what has made this film impactful not just in Indonesia but everywhere is that you approach these people not as Indonesians, not as representatives of a particular case study or country but as human beings from a place of very intimate proximity. It's precisely that intimacy that elevates Anwar, Adi, Adi's mother from being one of millions of Indonesians in this awful history, windows on this far-off world that we can know and feel self-righteous about, to being human beings in whom we see ourselves.”



***The Look of Silence* opens Sheffield Doc/Fest on 5 June and is released in UK cinemas on 12 June**

*Campaigning films will confront a lie and say, ‘This is a lie,’ but they won't show its workings – and that is bound to have less impact than deconstructing the lie itself*



## CHANGING FORTUNES

*While it's clear that documentaries have enjoyed a surge in popularity in the past few years, inflated claims about their ability to effect social change don't stand up to scrutiny*

**By Brian Winston**

What's with documentary these days? Channel 4's Britdoc Foundation knows. "The power of film to change the world," it claimed in a 2014 report, "has become impossible to ignore." Documentaries are causing "serious social change". Really?

OK, documentaries have never been as popular. Take the Discovery Channel. Founded in 1985 as a documentary showcase, it now claims to be the world's most watched pay-TV service with millions of "cumulative subscribers". Around 4.5 million viewers for a show in the US is not unknown; that is an audience about half the size of a successful mainstream television comedy or drama. The big-screen figures have also been eye-catching. *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), Michael Moore's response to the 2001 attack, still leads the pack with grosses of \$221 million worldwide, but there have been enough other hits to tantalise everyone in the sector with the prospect of riches. And Britdoc itself is giving Oscar-style awards for documentaries with change-making 'impact' – the 'Pumas' – measuring it not just by audience size but by social network traffic and concrete outcomes as well.

On the other hand, as Nick Fraser, the BBC's main documentary man, points out: "The much-hailed triumph of documentary films subsists on the shakiest of foundations." Let's go back to the numbers: *Fahrenheit 9/11*'s box-office revenue is a mere eight per cent of that of *Avatar*, king of the fiction films; it's also a full third of the take of all documentaries combined over the past 15 years. The fact is, most documentaries still do not register and their makers struggle to make a living.

And what "serious social change"? We can count audiences and even test raised awareness with questionnaires, etc, but we don't – can't – know much beyond that. Attitude shifts and education are, of course, important, but for real change-making impact, it is people's actions "after the lights go up" – as film activist pioneer George Stoney put it – which matter more.

This can happen, but does so very rarely. In the 18 months following the release of *Blackfish*, Gabriela Cowperthwaite's Puma-winning 2013 investigation into the cruelties



**A fish out of water: *Blackfish* had a negative impact on SeaWorld Entertainment's share price**

of marine parks, Sea World Entertainment, the company featured in the film, suffered a 60 per cent fall in its share price; but that apparent effect is an exception proving the rule. A far more typical Puma awardee is 2012's *The Act of Killing*, Joshua Oppenheimer's vivid take on a hidden holocaust in Indonesia in the 1960s. It was released in 50-odd countries, presold to numerous television channels and won countless awards and prizes, generating 1.3 million hits on the online trailer, 352,418 visits to its site, 8,235 'likes', 3,935 'follows' etc. But all these bums on various seats yielded only \$486,919 in receipts and, meanwhile, the killers still walk free and those behind them remained unnamed – unchanged.

Oppenheimer's work did have an impact, though – it won him a MacArthur Foundation 'genius' award. And the life of Adi, the central character in *The Look of Silence*, also changed. He has had to move home. No surprise there – see *Big Brother*, etc. But we are not talking about those sorts of individual impacts. We are talking "serious social change" and that's hard to show. After all, the most sustained media efforts to alter behaviour have been health promotion campaigns, but the extensive research on these reveals only mixed results. Seatbelt campaigns (backed by the law) might have worked, but 'Five a day'? We are still getting fatter.

Britdoc has noted 87 activist campaigns around the world using documentary. The technology is helping: it is ever easier for people to make their own films, and their audience can interact with those in ways

*We can count audiences and even test raised awareness with questionnaires, etc, but we can't know much beyond that*

impossible before digital. Community-focused efforts avoid the problem of (usually privileged Western) activists, their intentions impeccable, parachuting in. And digital interaction by the audience can yield enhanced engagement and understanding.

But it is easy to over-claim. Successful consequences require carefully targeting an audience who can make a difference. Doing that can facilitate correcting specific miscarriages of justice, helping interventions in gang wars or getting wells dug – all socially valuable, albeit limited. But widespread social change? Given the general state we are in, even the uncynical will find that difficult to discern.

And we shouldn't be looking for it.

Even if it can be shown to be happening, that doesn't – and cannot – prove media impact, however many 'likes' and tweets are counted. The myriad of influences on any situation make it hard to isolate a direct social consequence of a single message – of a single documentary. Sociologists have been trying to demonstrate media effects for 90 years, but 'proved' very little. It's pointless starting the same search with documentaries. And chilling.

Documentaries should be about setting out stalls in the marketplace of ideas. Impact wants to see, as it were, sales receipts – and that is dangerous. Imagine: funding a serious documentary about drones comes down to its potential as a 'kill a terrorist' videogame. Necessary investigations of the world's ills are dismissed as impact-less because "we've seen it all before". And pitching films actually calling for real serious social change (aka revolution)? Forget it.

Setting up an expectation that documentaries can or should do more than just 'show us life' can easily backfire. Let's not do it. ☹



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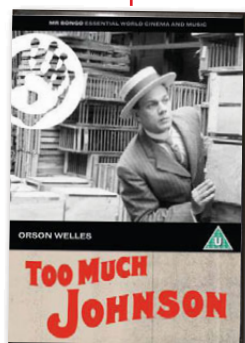
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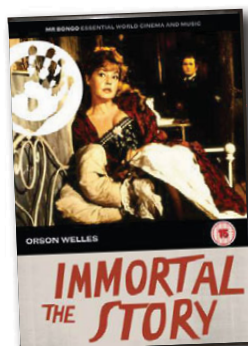
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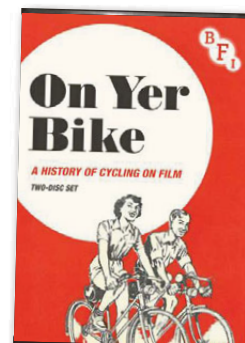
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# ANATOMY OF HELL

*John Huston's 'The Misfits', which tells the story of a recently divorced woman hooking up with an older cowboy in the Nevada desert, shows the essential incompatibility of two people striving to be together when what they really want is to be alone*

**By Peter Tonguet**

*"Hell, Señora, I assure you; hell at its best that is, its most solitary – though perhaps you would prefer company."*  
George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

**At the beginning of** *The Misfits* (1961), pieces from a jigsaw puzzle hover over a black screen. The names of cast and crew flash by, but the shapes never align harmoniously. Director John Huston could not have chosen a more undisguised metaphor; more than one observer has found parallels to the story in these ill-fitting geometric forms.

Some would say that even the film is misaligned, but let's start with the opening titles: they are counterfeit Saul Bass, a good idea rendered without an abundance of sophistication or elegance. The cast is discombobulated, too; the only common point among the stars was that each was on his or her last leg.

There is Clark Gable, gnarled before his time, who took his cue from James Dean and died ahead of the film's arrival in cinemas. There is Marilyn Monroe, who would not live to see another film through to completion. And there is Montgomery Clift, who would appear in just three more films – including one with Huston directing (*Freud* in 1962) – before he too met his end.

A harder lot was found behind the camera. The film was not well received in 1961, prompting the critic David Thomson to ponder whether it might have finished Huston. "But," Thomson wrote, "he was probably the person least weighed down by the film's failure." Indeed, Huston lived long and prospered, as did screenwriter Arthur Miller (then husband to Monroe). But Huston and Miller, too, were oil and water: the director who churned out films like they were going out of style (he made seven more, plus snippets of *Casino Royale*, before the 1960s were up) and the playwright unaccustomed to moving pictures.

It is lucky, then, that this discordant group was making *The Misfits* – a film about the basic incompatibility of people. "If I'm going to be alone, I want to be by myself," says Roslyn Taber (Monroe) to the man who is, for the moment, still her husband (a cameo by hapless Kevin McCarthy). The marrieds are on their way to be divorced in a Reno, Nevada, courtroom, but the occasion brings forth none of the jubilation of, say, George Cukor's *The Women* (1939) or Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth* (1937).

Thelma Ritter plays Isabelle Steers, Roslyn's landlady, but her gung-ho attempts at playing divorce-proceedings tutor to Roslyn – "Did your husband Raymond Taber act








**WHEEL OF FORTUNE**  
*The Misfits*, starring Marilyn Monroe as Roslyn Taber and Clark Gable as Gay Langland (left), was the last film to be completed by the actors before their deaths

toward you with cruelty?" – fall on deaf ears. Roslyn is in no mood to celebrate. A delight whenever she appears on screen, Ritter gives a performance that functions as a sequel to her nurse in *Rear Window* (1954), but while the earlier character was a fount of wholesome advice to Jimmy Stewart (telling him he could get "six months in the workhouse" for spyin' and all that), Isabelle takes too, too much pleasure in marital dissolution. "This'll be my 77th time I've witnessed for a divorce!" she says excitedly. "Two 7s. That's lucky, darlin'!" Roslyn replies, sighing, "Oh, Iz, I hope." Solitude may be Roslyn's preferred state, but it also is a glum one.

Maybe Roslyn is apathetic because she cannot conceive of a mate to take her ex's place. In an earlier epoch, Clark Gable might have fitted the bill, but as Huston presents him in *The Misfits*, the leading man of *It Happened One Night* (1934) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) has gone AWOL. (Gable, wrote Thomson, was "59 as if 59 was the old man and the sea".) We first see cowboy Gay Langland (Gable) in a long shot at a Reno train station, his arms around a woman and his head bobbing as he presumably whispers her sweet nothings. But, perversely, the image turns out to be a parody of a romantic sendoff. When the film cuts to a closer angle of the couple, the over-the-shoulder shot favours her rather than him; his goodbyes, then, essentially play off camera, rendering them laughably insincere. "Well, will you think of me? Oh, Gay..." the woman asks, plaintively. To have seen Gable's face as he answers – "Oh, you know I will, honey: goodbye!" – would have been to risk falling for Gay's disingenuous claptrap. Gable practically shoos the woman aboard the train, and his tiny patronising waves are those of someone saying so long for good. Moments later, when Gay sees his friend Guido (Eli Wallach), his antisocial instincts are confirmed: "I'll tell you, I'm dying for some fresh air," Gay says. "And no people, male or female!"

Of course, Gay and Roslyn are destined – by fate or by Arthur Miller – to meet, but their uneasy, thoroughly unromantic first encounter presages their ultimate irreconcilable differences. Seated with Isabelle in a casino bar, Roslyn moons over a dog across from them, not realising it belongs to Gay. Of course, Gay and Guido quickly make their way to Roslyn and Isabelle's table. Introductions are made, but Roslyn only has eyes for her new four-legged friend; emphasising her naturally distraught manner, Monroe convincingly appears more interested in feeding a canine than in chatting with Rhett Butler. 



➡ Inevitably, Gay is enchanted by Roslyn, but they never seem closer than worlds apart. Early on, thrust together in Gay's pickup truck, he gazes at a sleepy Roslyn and says, "You're a real beautiful woman. It's almost kind of an honour sittin' next to you." But Roslyn does not respond in kind, and Huston frames the two in such a way – each is given big head close-ups – to emphasise the chasm between them, namely, the 25 years in age that separated Gable and Monroe. Once, Gable was married to Carole Lombard, but time does not stand still; Lombard would have been 53 in 1961.

Director of photography Russell Metty (working in severe black and white) can do no wrong when it comes to Monroe, predictably enough, but his lighting of Gable in this scene is as unkind as Haskell Wexler's was of Richard Burton five years later in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966) – every pore, crack and crevice is illuminated. In his 1987 memoir *Timebends: A Life*, Miller admitted agonising over the film's visual style shifting from wide shots – "The immense dead spaces of Nevada in which man seems lost" – to close-ups. He conceded, "Still, I saw a point in... Metty's insistence that 'they're not going to pay to get into this movie to see scenery.'" In fact, the tight angles complement Miller's vision. Thanks to Metty's handiwork, the "dead spaces" Miller refers to apply not only to the bone-dry landscape but also to his characters' faces.

Somehow, Gay manages to entice Roslyn to join him in a bleak abode – a half-done hole in the wall owned by Guido – situated in the Nevada hinterlands. ("I've seen a picture of the moon once – it looked just like this," says Cliff's character, Perce Howland, a rodeo rider who later joins the band of oddballs.) But it is Miller's screenplay as much as Metty's camera that makes Gable unappealing. The one-liners come fast and furious from Gay – "Swell sport, that woman," he says of his train station lover; "Put that in your thoughts and see how they come out," he says, by way of offering Roslyn a drink – but it fails to charm. Perhaps no star of Gable's ilk ended his career with such a distasteful performance. Like a hollowed-out Hawksian professional, Gay talks a good game, forever puffing his chest at finding work that does not involve the acceptance of "wages", but underneath the raillery and machismo is a kind of beast.

Signs slowly emerge in the desert. Gay speaks casually of Guido hunting eagles from his plane, and when he decides to act on a hunch that a lettuce patch has been disturbed by a rabbit, he rushes for his gun. Roslyn objects loudly to these displays, though Gay is surprisingly tolerant. They quarrel over his plan to kill the trespassing rabbit, but Gay moves on quickly – "Honey, when you smile, it's like the sun comin' up." Yet this is an indication not of his magnanimity, but of his ignorance, his limitations: for Roslyn to have humane arguments against Gay's lethal way of life is, simply, beyond his comprehension. He has an answer for everything. Near the end, when Roslyn is given the news that the mustangs being nabbed in the film's famous finale are on their way to becoming food for pets, Gay states the ugly truth as if it's no big deal: "Like you buy in the store for the dog and the cat..."

"We were two parts, however remote, of this society, of this life," Miller said in an interview decades after the death of Monroe. "One was sensuous and life-loving it seemed, while in the centre of it there was a darkness



*The denouement of the film never convinces. The world thus far has been too grotesque, and Roslyn too strident in setting herself apart from it, for a happy ending*

and a tragedy that I didn't know the dimensions of at that time." Such virtues – of vitality and empathy – are transferred to Roslyn. "You care – whatever happens to anybody, happens to you," Guido says to Roslyn – words that, strangely enough, echo the famous vows of Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* ("Wherever there's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there...") She is an oasis of goodness, but an oasis is, by definition, on its own.

Roslyn's inability to cease caring – about the fate of animals, about Perce knocking himself out at a rodeo – is surely the only reason she continues to share her life with Gay; they are close in no other way. It is not coincidental that she is most tender toward him one night when he drinks to excess and makes a fool of himself (a wincing *tour de force* by Gable). For Roslyn, Gay is no different than a dog, an eagle, a rabbit or a mustang – a creature to pity. The most touching acting of Monroe's career comes when she averts her eyes as Gay and Perce lasso six mustangs, one at a time, as Guido drives through a dust bowl of a setting that calls to mind nothing so much as the ending of Erich von Stroheim's *Greed* (1923). After they are roped, Roslyn tries to intervene (and is initially rebuffed by Gay), but most of the time she is there to bear witness – to see something awful because someone should, as when her eyes meet the horses'. Was Monroe taking to heart the line in Miller's *Death of a Salesman* – "So attention must be paid"?

If the film had stopped there, it could be counted among Huston's masterpieces. The denouement – in which Gay has a change of heart over the mustangs, followed by Gay and Roslyn bringing down the barriers between them – never convinces. The world thus far has been too grotesque, and Roslyn too strident in setting herself apart from it, for a happy ending. But for nearly two hours of its running time, the ill-matched elements of *The Misfits* make for a convincing vision of hell – a place, as Don Juan said in George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, that was, "at its best", solitary in nature. ❧

**i** *The Misfits* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 12 June, and screens as part of a Marilyn Monroe season at BFI Southbank, London, throughout June

**QUEEN OF THE DESERT**  
Monroe with Montgomery Clift, who plays Perce Howland (above), a rodeo rider who joins the band of oddballs in the Nevada desert in *The Misfits*

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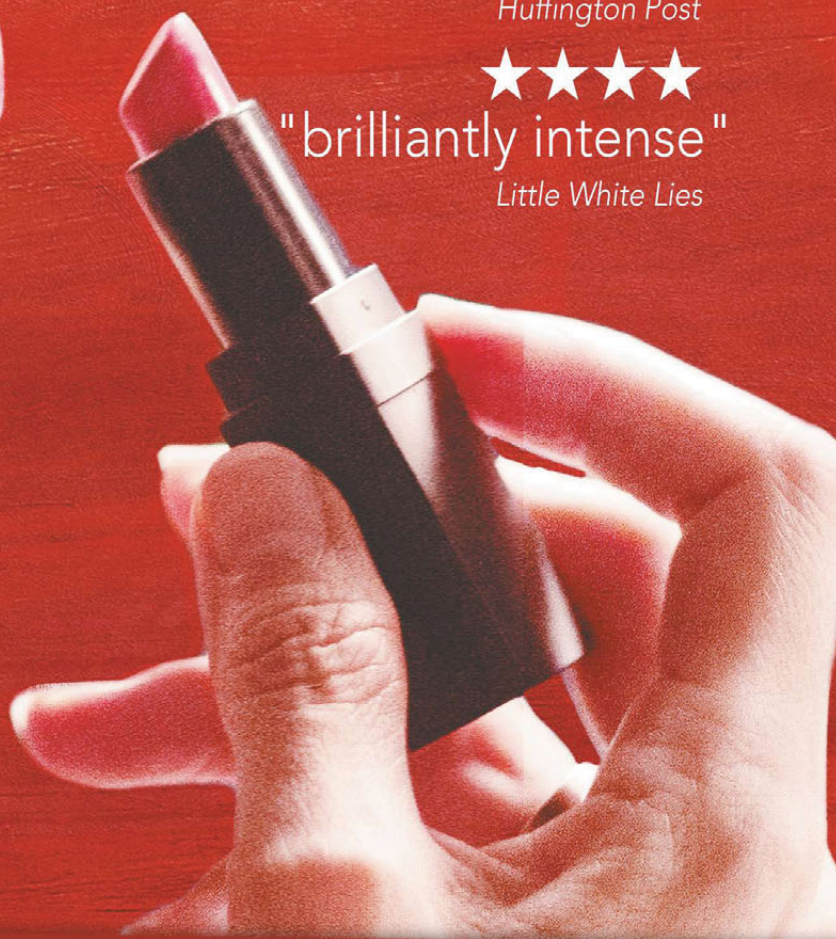
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# JOHN BOORMAN

*Queen and Country*, the belated sequel to *Hope and Glory*, follows the director's young alter ego into the army during the Korean War and observes his dawning realisation that National Service is far from the 'joke' he had first imagined. Below, the director of *Point Blank* and *Deliverance* talks about the relationship between memory and imagination in autobiographical cinema and reflects on his 50-year career in film. **Interview by Philip Horne**

The 82-year-old John Boorman, director of many remarkable films, including *Point Blank* (1967), the Oscar-nominated *Deliverance* (1972) and the Oscar-nominated, autobiographical *Hope and Glory* (1987), has made another, his first since *The Tiger's Tail* in 2006. *Queen and Country*, a sequel to *Hope and Glory*, which concerned his boyhood in the London suburbs during the Blitz, picks up Boorman's alter ego Bill (here played by Callum Turner) as a bright, sarcastic, romantic, alienated young man in 1952, undergoing National Service during the Korean War – as an instructor in a training camp. His story is told through his relationships with his unstable, rebellious best friend Percy (Caleb Landry Jones); a beautiful, troubled, indeed suicidal upper-class girl he calls Ophelia (Tamsin Egerton); and a more down-to-earth, good-hearted nurse, Sophie (Aimee-Ffion Edwards) – with whom, by the end, he is making an amateur film. Like *Hope and Glory* it is packed with unexpected personal detail, mixed in tone as life is, sharply satirical, political, broadly comic, deeply felt – and only some of its material is familiar from Boorman's wonderfully evocative memoir *Adventures of a Suburban Boy* (2003).

Having seen the film at the BFI London Film Festival, I flew to Ireland in November 2014 and was John Boorman's guest at his extraordinary house in the Wicklow Mountains, which he has lived in since 1970 and which features in another autobiographical film, *I Dreamt I Woke Up* (1991). We spoke in the large, bright drawing-room.

**Philip Horne:** What is the idea of *Queen and Country* as a title?

**John Boorman:** It's a slightly ironic title, obviously, and I wanted one which had a bit of a ring that associated it with *Hope and Glory*. And the Queen coming to the throne was quite an important element of the story. Astonishingly, she's still there 60 years later [laughs]. *Skiving* was my original title – but I was dissuaded, because Americans wouldn't know the word, and nobody knew how to translate it into other languages.

**PH:** It's threaded through with film references – Shepperton Studios, *Casablanca*, a postcard of Jane Russell in *The Outlaw*, a reference to

Clifton Webb in *Laura*, *Rashomon*, the “new Hitchcock” *Strangers on a Train*, *Sunset Blvd...*

**JB:** They were all films that opened at that time. At the end of *Hope and Glory*, when the grandfather's taking him to school, they pass a film unit from Shepperton Studios on the river's edge, shooting a film. The grandfather says something like, “Big strapping fellows playing silly buggers when they should be at war...”

**PH:** And then *Queen and Country* ends with the camera whirring as Bill films a scene, also in the river, and the clockwork mechanism winding down.

**JB:** Well, it was just to indicate that he's starting to make films. And then when the camera stops, that was my signal – that's the end of it. To indicate that this would be my last film. But you know, I'm being encouraged to do something more.

**PH:** How closely is Bill modelled on yourself? Is it really about your own experience?

**JB:** Yes, it is. But the relationship between memory and imagination is quite mysterious, so in a way what I was looking for, in *Hope and Glory* and in this one, was a certain kind of truth.

**PH:** *Queen and Country* shows a deeply divided England – in those conversations Bill has in the film with Sergeant Major Bradley [David Thewlis], where Bradley says,

“Our country is fucked,” and Bill replies, “Your country, sir. But our country is not.”

**JB:** The whole subtext of the film was about that generational thing after the war, where the older generation, the soldiers, still had that ethos of king and country and empire – and we younger ones could all see that it was over, that something quite different was needed. And when the Attlee government came in, in '45, we had great hopes for something really revolutionary – to get rid of the class system, and the aristocracy and royalty. Of course, it happened a little bit, but not much. From 1944 on, the Education Act, which set up the secondary modern schools, did have a huge effect. When I was at school at the age of 11 you either went to a grammar school to learn Latin and Greek or you went to learn metalwork. The secondary modern schools – the people who went to them really produced the sixties, the music and art and all that. Suddenly you had this blossoming which came out because for the first time kids were taught a bit of literature and art and music. But that was the only thing that happened, in a sense. There was the National Health Service – it was a tremendous reforming government – but it was just frittered away, we only got a kind of echo of what could have been. That was what was underneath the film. In a modest way, I was trying to show what the hopes were then for a new England, so that you could compare it to what actually turned out.

**PH:** So there was real rebelliousness. And now deference has gone, but hopelessness has taken over.

**JB:** Exactly.

**PH:** The character of Ophelia – looking through *Adventures of a Suburban Boy* – seems to be a combination of elements...

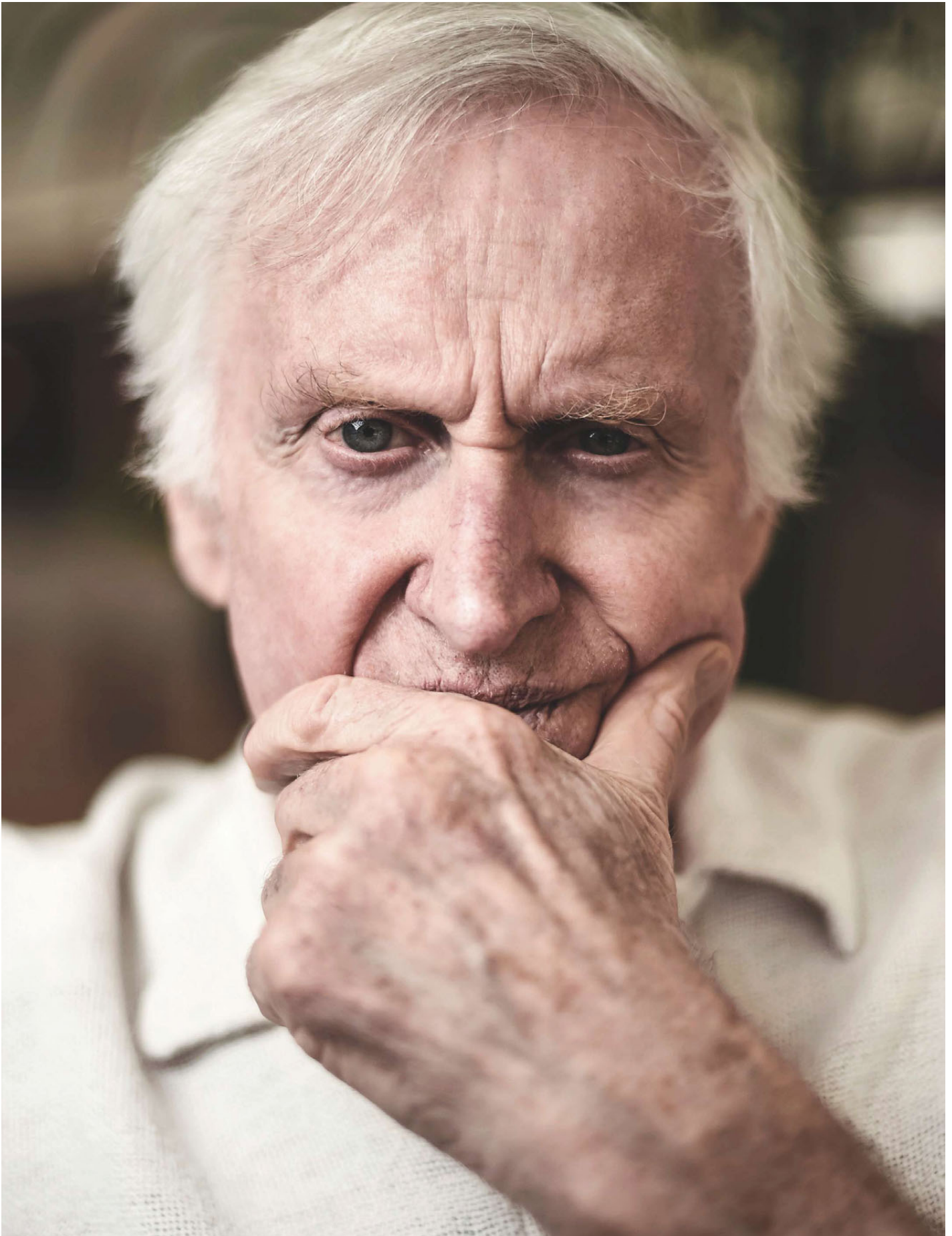
**JB:** Well, there was a girl, a very upper-class girl, that I got involved with somewhat, in a very frustrating way, and so I wanted to do a number of things – one of them being to emphasise this gap in class. So she's very much like this girl I knew, but it was a bit of a combination, really.

**PH:** The name Bill gives her, Ophelia, connects her with the water. She says of



*Queen and Country*







**her depression, "It's like living underwater. Everything is muffled, far away."**

**JB:** Well, early on, in the punt scene, he says, "You're suicidal." And in that last scene in her hospital bed, she says, "I was lying face down in a pool, seeing my life in flashback like William Holden [in *Sunset Blvd.*]." The intention was to suggest she had tried to drown herself, she had actually grown into the name he had given her.

**PH:** And does that connect her for you with your preoccupation, since at least *Excalibur* [1981], with the lady in the lake – who was played by Janet McTeer, in this very room, in *I Dreamt I Woke Up*?

**JB:** Oh yes. And you get a little echo of that when Sophie's pretending to drown at the end.

**PH:** The comedy in the film, which is wonderfully energetic, turns sour later on. Bill says about Bradley, who's a sort of Malvolio: "We wrecked his life." And the traumatic visit to the military sanatorium, where Bill sees the casualties of war – is that also something that happened?

**JB:** Yes. And it was quite shattering. Because conscription, for me, was many things, but it was always a bit of a joke. The attitude of all the conscripts, really, was that this was something to get through. What's the easiest way to get through these two years? It was only going to that sanatorium, where you see these boys broken by it all – it was such a shocking thing for me. Suddenly the reality of it came home with a bang.

**PH:** What do you see as the things you gain and lose with experience and how has the filmmaking process changed for you across a 50-year career as a director?

**JB:** Well, first films often are quite good, and they're often made out of ignorance. Often a young or inexperienced director has a vision, an idea, and plunges into it without realising all the problems he's going to confront. So there will be a producer and cameraman and an assistant director who stop him from falling on his face, and somehow he'll stagger through it and it works. And the more you learn, the more you can predict problems that are going to arise, and this can make you cautious – you say, "Well, yes, it's too tricky, too dependent on weather, this scene, so maybe we'll set it indoors" – things like that. So the more you know, the more you understand the problems that could possibly arise, the more you tend to take action to avoid them. And the films lack that daring, or recklessness, that can sometimes make them work.

**PH:** So is there a paradox whereby the more you master it, the more you risk losing that original excitement?

**JB:** I think there is. Jean-Luc Godard and I were talking about this, and he said, "You have to be young and stupid to make a film. If you know as much as we do, it's impossible [laughs]." And that's an extension of my point. So it's slightly mysterious. One of the things about being more prepared is that shooting itself becomes in a way disappointing, because the clearer your vision is of the film you want to make, almost inevitably you fail to achieve it totally. Whereas when you're starting out you're amazed at these shots you're able to get – you know, "Wow!"... When you get older, you don't quite get that. It falls short. There are moments of

invention, or happenchance occurs when you're shooting to make it better in ways you hadn't anticipated. That's wonderful when it happens.

Even on *Queen and Country* there were little things: for instance, in one of those scenes in their barrack-room, when Percy collapses on the bed with laughter, and throws this pillow at Bill – it wasn't planned, he just did it. Seamus [Deasy], who also operates as well as lighting, which I always like – Vilmos [Zsigmond] did that, and Conrad Hall did that, and so does Philippe Rousselot; I like one man doing it – Percy threw the pillow, and Seamus just panned instinctively with it, without rehearsal or anything. Things do happen that can be wonderful. In *Excalibur* when Merlin takes the baby from Igrayne, and the baby catches hold of Igrayne's hair and hangs on to it, and the baby's pulled away holding the hair – that just happened spontaneously. It was incredible – a mother being separated from her child, and the child hanging on to her hair...

**PH:** In 2013 the BFI Southbank showed some of your TV documentaries, including *Citizen 63* [1963] and *The Newcomers* [1964], which are impressive and very suggestive. But those weren't the first things you'd done for television?

**JB:** No, I'd done lots of individual half-hour documentaries. They're somewhere there in the

*'Point Blank' was at one level a documentary about Lee Marvin's despair and his attempts to recover from the trauma of war*

BBC, documentaries about people and places. Of course, I'd seen the French and American *cinéma vérité* films, so I was trying to get to that level. The difficulty was that in the context of television budgets, you didn't have enough film really to do it properly. You'd be given a budget and a certain amount of film, and you had to make do with it. I made one about the Salisbury Cathedral Close, the people who lived there, the choir, and just the life of the close. And I did a number of documentaries like that, about people and places. And that led to *Citizen 63*. When I proposed it, [Donald] Baverstock, who was running BBC1, was very much against it, because he said you couldn't make a film about people who hadn't distinction of some kind. My point was, I wanted to find people who represented something, rather than being distinctive in their own right. He said, "You want to make a film about a 15-year-old girl at a secondary modern school? Why should a million people spend half an hour – that's 500,000 hours – to look at this inconsequential person [laughs]?" He turned it down. Then Huw Wheldon took over, and he approved it. In a sense this film about this girl, Marion Knight, who was really quite a rebel, was a way of discovering a new phenomenon, the teenager – because there hadn't been teenagers before. People kept saying to me afterwards, "Where do you find these people?" And Huw Wheldon said, "He doesn't find them, he recognises them."

*The Newcomers* I did for the beginning of BBC2 [which launched in 1964] – Huw Wheldon asked me and others to do something experimental. *The Newcomers* was in six half-hours, all about



Water under the bridge: Lee Marvin as the vengeful Walker in *Point Blank* (1967)





**Hell in the Pacific (1968)**

this couple [Anthony and Alison Smith], but each one was in a different form. One was about a party, one about their fantasies, and the last one was... when she gives birth – I had cameras out recording what happened in Bristol during those hours. The audience was quite confused by it, I think, because of the changing styles. I don't think people were quite ready for it. But it was an interesting idea: it was trying to look at a couple, from different aspects, different angles. So in a sense *The Newcomers* was starting to move into elements of drama, and then I did *The Quarry* [1966], which was dramatic with elements of documentary – that was the progression. In fact, later on, *I Dreamt I Woke Up* in a way goes back to that – to my BBC days, of mixing documentary and drama. It's partly me describing the place where I live, and then it becomes mystical or transcendental and John Hurt becomes my alter ego – it's quite an interesting film in many ways.

**PH: On *The Newcomers*, you say in *The Adventures of a Suburban Boy*, "I began to question the ethics of probing lives like this", which made me think of Kieslowski deciding to stop making documentaries...**

**JB:** Yes, well I reached that point. Particularly in *Citizen 63*, the young girl – it affected her, and adversely, I think – to a point where she was living with us for a while just to get over her reactions to this thing and to other people's reactions to it. And then also with *The Newcomers*, particularly Alison, the wife, she was very affected by it – and I began to feel I was coming to the end of what I could do with documentaries. With *The Newcomers*, it ended with the birth – she had twins – and I was there, shooting the birth, while we were shooting her actual husband pacing up and down in his flat, waiting. There was something... oh, not quite right about that. Fundamentally, I thought the more penetrating and effective the documentaries were, the more damaging they were to the people who were submitting themselves as subjects. And there was a certain falsity about it, in that there were certain areas you couldn't go into – the bedroom door was always closed. I was moving towards drama in order to find ways of doing things I couldn't do in documentary.

**PH: It seems rather extraordinary now that the playwrights Tom Stoppard, Charles Wood and Peter Nicholls – who co-wrote your first feature, *Catch Us If You Can* [1965] – should all have been in Bristol too at that time. Having Tom Stoppard in *The Newcomers* is an extraordinary piece of luck – because he is a very entertaining presence, isn't he?**



**Excalibur (1981)**

**JB:** He is, yes. He was a friend of Anthony Smith and that's how he entered the whole thing. The first time I met Tom we were going to be shooting high up in this sort of attic apartment. I climbed up the stairs with the camera and my crew, and we got up there and on the floor was this, er – it looked like a bundle of old clothes. It turned out to be Tom, who had spent the night on the floor. So he got out from under this blanket, and stood up... with a kind of elegance. He always had that. He was very impoverished at the time... He'd been working on the *Western Daily Press*, as a journalist, and he left and was writing without any income, really. You know, I paid him a few quid – helped to keep him going! Tom and I have been close friends for I don't know how long. He's come over here several times when he's been writing, to get away.

**PH: But you never thought of collaborating?**

**JB:** Well, we did once do a script together called *Naked Without a Gun*. It was a sort of hybrid. There was a gangster element, but it was about these young people. We worked on it, but it never quite... I was doing it for Warners, and I remember right here on this carpet – at that time, before computers, it was all scissors and paste and Sellotape – we were both kneeling here, and I had the scissors and was cutting the scenes out to put them in a different spot. And Tom said suddenly, "It's never occurred to me before – I suppose that this is how you do screenplays." And he said, "My screenplays are impaired plays!"... So he never really embraced the role of the screenwriter.

**PH: One of the things you've said about *Point Blank*, your first Hollywood film, is that it was a character study of Lee Marvin, in a way – a kind of psychological portrait.**

**JB:** I had really no idea of what to make of the original *Point Blank* script except for this character, who, you know, is shot and apparently left for dead and then comes back. So, anyway, we talked about all kinds of things, and Lee then started to speak about his war experience. He was a sniper, during the Pacific War, on these islands. He would be landed in a rubber boat on the beach, and he would go inland and he would hide, prior to the invasion. And he'd then start shooting at the Japanese from behind the lines. It was a very hazardous thing. And so what I came to realise was that he was completely brutalised by the war, and that in a way acting for him was a way to recover his humanity, or to purge himself of what he'd done. And so my approach to the thing grew out of that. As I developed the idea, that's what attracted him, because it was a playing out of his psychology. Everyone – his agent and everybody – was absolutely astonished



**Hope and Glory (1987)**

when he said he was going to do this, at this point; there was no script, and he committed.

**PH: So is there a way in which it was like what your documentaries had been doing?**

**JB:** Well, it was. In a sense I was using the techniques I'd been using to probe people's lives, and *Point Blank* was at one level a documentary about his agony and despair and his attempts to recover from that trauma. And that's what gave it its power. Because often over the years people have asked me, "What is it about that film that is so powerful?" And the power all came from Lee.

**PH: *Point Blank* is one of the films, like *Deliverance*, where you've talked about being in a state of grace when you were making them. And in both of them you were dealing with something that was, in a way, out of your control...**

**JB:** Yes. There's that wonderful quote in Isherwood's *Prater Violet* [1945] when the film director talks about a film: "The film is an infernal machine. Once it is ignited and set in motion it revolves with an enormous dynamism. It cannot pause. It cannot apologise... It simply ripens to its inevitable explosion." It gathers this strength and movement and emotion that can't be denied; once you've got it going all you can do is hang on to it.

**PH: Is it that in a way you weren't in control of everything, that you just had to follow what Lee Marvin was doing?**

**JB:** There was a kind of energy, this force that was there, and I was trying to harness it and work with it. As you say, it was like being in a state of grace. And it happens more when you're young – and somehow connected. And this goes right against what I was talking about, about making all the decisions beforehand.

**PH: There's a circularity in many of your films, returning to where they start. *Queen and Country* has the river, and *Excalibur* has the lake...**

**JB:** Well, I always think of endings as being not so much to do with story as with atmosphere and emotion. *Point Blank*, for instance – I struggled to get an ending there. And finally I decided, he just gradually fades into darkness – a series of shots in which he just sort of disappears. A lot of people found that unsatisfactory: he doesn't take the money. [But] that was okay, because it wasn't about the money, really. The fading away was to suggest that possibly he hadn't really existed at all. But it took a long time to reach that.

**PH: And there's a shot at the end that pulls back and shows Alcatraz...**

**JB:** You're looking down at the body lying there and the camera comes up and there's Alcatraz across the water...



**PH:** And we thought we were on Alcatraz. Is that also distancing us from the fiction?

**JB:** Yeah, yeah. But *Excalibur* has a perfect ending: return the sword to the lake.

**PH:** And in *Deliverance* he has a nightmare at the end where the hand comes out of the water.

**JB:** It's a nightmare, yes. He wakes up – he saw the hand coming out of the water and he wakes up. It's a strange thing, with *Deliverance*, how that whole thing of the terror of the woods – it's so atavistic, from when everything was forest – it must go very, very deep, because it's entered the language in a way, *Deliverance*. Just the other day someone sent me a T-shirt where two of the *Peanuts* characters are paddling a canoe, and one says, "Paddle faster, I hear banjos." It's very indirect, really... and yet everyone understands. It's strange, isn't it?

**PH:** You said when you looked at *Deliverance* again that you thought it could have been made last year. I mean, partly because of the setting in the woods, and partly the desaturation of the colour, which you took great pains with, but it is a look that now seems completely...

**JB:** Well, they were wearing the kind of things that people still wear when they go on that kind of thing, very simple, so there's very little to date it. At the beginning there's a car, but that's about it. So it doesn't date that badly.

**PH:** Would it be right to say that on *Point Blank* and *Deliverance* there are more long shots – maybe a slightly cooler emotional temperature, or more distance from the characters?

**JB:** Well, yes, with *Point Blank*, it was anamorphic, wide screen, and so was *Deliverance* – and both for the same reason. When I was preparing *Point Blank* they produced a 40mm lens, a wide lens, for the first time, and I used it all the way through the picture, because I wanted these stark compositions where the characters seemed to be trapped in the landscapes and the settings. And in *Deliverance* in somewhat the same way, so you felt these fragile human beings as tiny against this vast power of nature.

**PH:** *Hell in the Pacific* [1968] tells the tale of an American and a Japanese soldier during WWII who are stranded on an island and have to join forces to survive. What's the correct ending, yours or the one the studio imposed?

**JB:** Well, it [originally] ended not with a bang but with a whimper [laughs]. The two men, Lee Marvin and Toshio Mifune, once they put on their uniforms they recover their identities and enmities, they become angry with each other, and you feel that it's moving towards a confrontation despite all they've been through – the closeness they've achieved during the course of the film evaporates. But what has occurred between them is sufficient to restrain them, so you don't get the violence at the end that you'd expect – they simply separate and walk away. That was the ending. The studio's was such a dreadful ending because after everything they'd been through, and survived, then an arbitrary bomb drops on them and kills them – it's so depressing. It was a stock shot of a building exploding. Ridiculous.

**PH:** I've noticed a number of crucifixions in your films – in *Deliverance* there's a deposition where they're carrying the body of the mountain man, and in *The General* there's Jimmy being nailed to the billiard table, explicitly like Christ.



*Deliverance* (1972)

Then in *Hell in the Pacific* there's the bit where Marvin and Mifune are tying each other to the log – where the score sounds like a Bach Passion... That was conscious, that echo?

**JB:** Yes, it was a reference. That was one of the best scenes in that film, where it was more difficult to be the master than the slave. Having to look after the slave was unbearable, you know – unbearably difficult [laughs]. I suppose most of these things are unconscious – one tends to gravitate to certain images and certain themes. For example, I always feel comfortable when I've got water in the scene, or there's some reference to lakes or rivers. I love the way that moving water reacts to film, it's very interesting. It reflects... and it has movement... A kind of entropy is taking place all the time.

**PH:** I suppose I have to ask whether *Queen and Country* will really be your last film...

**JB:** Ah well [laughs]. No. I'll tell you a little bit about this one called *Halfway House*, which Brendan Gleeson would like to do. Probably I'll do that if we get the money. I wrote it a few years back. It's a kind of version of the Orpheus legend.


*Someone sent me a T-shirt where two 'Peanuts' characters are paddling a canoe, and one says, 'Paddle faster, I hear banjos'*



*Zardoz* (1973)

This man has a marvellous relationship with this beautiful woman and she dies, and he's so shattered that he finds himself in this halfway house, which is where people go when they first die. They're given a tape or a disc of their whole life and have to edit it down to three hours before they can move on. So he goes there in pursuit of his wife, and comes and goes in the halfway house: his two worlds, the waking world and the dream world, become more and more interwoven, so it's a kind of story about love and death.

**PH:** Does that take elements from *I Dreamt I Woke Up*?

**JB:** Yes, it does. He meets his father there who's been working on his tape for the last five or six years. There's a sort of adjudicator – when you've done your tape, you have to bring it up and it has to be seen by an audience. If they don't find it amusing or satisfactory or penetrating or revealing you're sent off to redo it. You're reminded that you only exist while someone's watching you. The whole thing is a dissertation about the nature of film, and how a film only exists frame by frame – but it can be rewound, whereas life passes on. The future doesn't exist, we only exist in one frame at a time and once that frame has gone it's gone. Whereas film can be rewound [laughs]. So. 

**i** *Queen and Country* is released in the UK on 12 June and is reviewed on page 84



Natural mystic: Boorman with John Hurt during the filming of *I Dreamt I Woke Up* (1991)



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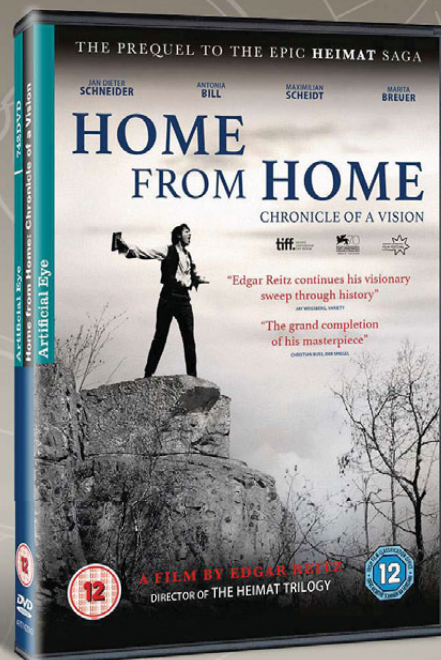
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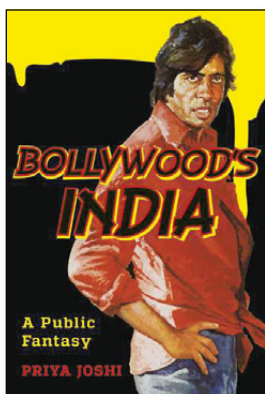
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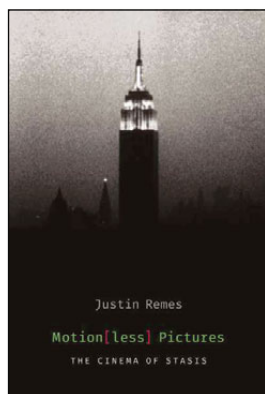
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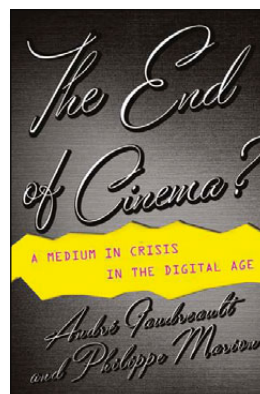
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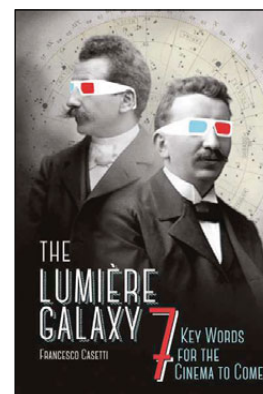
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PROFILE

## HIGH CONCEPT

Humorous and poetic, Yoko Ono's conceptual films can leave audiences soothed, provoked and sometimes even terrified

By Julian Ross

In December 1971, Yoko Ono reportedly set free a swarm of flies scented with her perfume from the sculpture garden of New York's Museum of Modern Art and invited guests to track them across the city. *Museum of Modern [F]art*, the 'one-woman show', was an unauthorised intervention on the grounds of MoMA. On the surface, the performance was a simple joke; by calling for participation and engaging with the outside world, it was also a critique of the institutional fortification of art. This balancing act is illustrative of the artistic approach Ono had honed over a decade of activity in various media – the period that is the subject of her first official solo exhibition at MoMA this summer.

The 1960s was a tumultuous decade for many, but particularly eventful for Yoko Ono. Moving between New York, Tokyo and London, as well as three marriages, Ono was winning a reputation as an artist, performer, activist and fierce feminist. What is less well known is her contribution to experimental film, where the screen became another surface on which her ideas took shape. Through her friendships with the underground filmmakers Jonas Mekas, Andy Warhol and Jimura Takahiko, Ono, in common with other artists of the period, took an interest in cinema. Considering white the most 'conceptual colour,' she felt cinema could also work for her; just as a blank page is white before her instructions were penned, a screen is white before projection commences. Film became a primary tool for her to stage the tension between play and societal critique.

Yoko Ono's conceptual ideas were resolutely simple, but singular, with a clarity that cut across the limitations of individual media. Mostly beginning as one or two lines on paper, Ono's instruction-based practice preoccupied her as early as 1955 and drew much admiration from George Maciunas, a founding member of Fluxus. The international artists' network's engagement with different media and desire for audience participation resonated with her own practice. In January 1966 she was invited by Maciunas to make her first films, in the apartment of the photographer Peter Moore. Using a rented camera with a high frame-rate – the only type of camera Maciunas could find – Ono realised her 1955 instructional work *Lighting Piece*, which simply read: "Light a match and watch till it goes out." Slowed down by the high frame-rate, the straightforward gesture of *One* (Fluxfilm No. 14) delivers a disarmingly blissful experience.

Without a hint of the self-seriousness we find in some contemporary slow cinema, Yoko Ono's long takes give space for a generous dose of humour as

well as contemplation. *Eyeblink* (1966) perfectly encapsulates this: it isn't until the end of the film that the viewer realises the blink is actually a wink. Oscillating between boredom and confoundment, the audiences for Ono's slow cinema are able to reflect on or respond to the viewing situation. At times, it can cause agitation – as happened during a screening of *Apotheosis* (1970) at Jonas Mekas's Film-Makers' Cinematheque in New York (the precursor to Anthology Film Archives), when the many minutes of white screen provoked audiences who had arrived with other expectations to begin shouting insults. At other

times, the viewing situation itself is brought into the work. *Self Portrait* (1969) consists of a close-up, lasting more than half an hour, of John Lennon's penis: it was presented to the press while Ono filmed their reactions on a hidden camera. She planned to use the footage of the bemused critics for a double-projection version that would surely have been a hilarious take on film spectatorship.

"She makes Antonioni seem like Hitchcock at his most extravagant," was how one London critic characterised Yoko Ono's works. The absence of narrative and extreme slowness of many of her works brought into play a bold simplicity



Ono akimbo: with Gaston Lachaise's *Standing Woman* (1932) at MoMA, New York, c.1961

IMAGES © YOKO ONO



that allowed them to be adapted to different contexts. For *Film No. 5 (Smile)* (1968), Yoko Ono printed multiple frames of a three-minute shot of Lennon's face. The resulting 51-minute version evoked the intimacy of home movies; copies were sold on 8mm film so that people could project it on the walls of their homes as 'light portraits'. *Film No. 5 (Smile)* also became background footage for an improvised concert at the Chicago Film Festival, to which the audience were invited to bring their own instruments. Slowness soothed or provoked, depending on context.

In the Fluxus spirit, Ono's work undermines authorial intent to encourage involvement and interpretation. In her 'film scores,' short instructions for imaginary films, Ono encouraged audiences to renegotiate their position in the act of watching films. In the published film scores she asks the audience to not look at round objects but only at angled ones; to not look at blue but only at red; to not look at Rock Hudson but only at Doris Day; and to stare at the screen until it turns black. In the most conceptually bold film score, the audience is asked to use scissors to cut off the images they don't like from the screen. Ono's much-quoted line "I thought art was a verb, rather than a noun" encapsulated her stance not only on art but also toward her audience. Even her two-line scripts for imaginary films – what she called her "beautiful never-nevers" – were written with the idea of encouraging others to make them. What appear to be jokes in Ono's ideas for films are in fact wry criticisms of cinema as an institution and attempts to reconstitute a dynamic relationship between artist and audience.

Thriving on controversy, Yoko Ono also sought to activate film culture more broadly. Her *Film No. 4 (Bottoms)* caused a stir when the British Board of Film Classification banned it because of its depiction of naked bodies. Blurring the lines between publicity stunt and Fluxus event, Ono hit headlines when she and her 'actors' staged a protest outside the offices of the BBFC, handing out daffodils while holding enlarged still photographs of a pair of full-framed bottoms. At the film's eventual premiere in London, a young man got on stage naked from the waist down and showed off his bottom to the audience. Peaceful protest became a form of performance practice for Ono, continuing with the 'Bed-Ins' with Lennon and her daughter Kyoko in hotel rooms in Amsterdam, Toronto and Montreal. Responding to a letter sent by the filmmaker Peter Watkins, in 1969 the couple called out for world peace, amid a period of violent protest and state aggression across the world. Even their most famous public appearance, recorded on film as *Bed Peace* (1969), was arguably an enactment of an Ono film score: just a year previously, she wrote *A Contemporary Sexual Manual* where a couple and a daughter sleep in bed and the audience imagine 366 sexual positions.

While Ono's enthusiasm for nakedness attracted publicity, it was also a feminist political statement. Presenting all different types of legs on screen, her feature-length *Up Your Legs Forever* (1970) offered balanced gender representation of a kind rarely seen in cinema. The film consists of a series of quick tilts from toe to upper thigh,



Slash fiction: Yoko Ono performing *Cut Piece* at Carnegie Hall, 1965


Ono's camera subverting any pornographic expectations aroused in the presence of naked bodies. In the one-shot film *Freedom* (1970), Yoko Ono struggles to take off her bra: just before she does, the film playfully overturns the titillation and cuts to black. Her cinema is wayward but never explicit; sexual expression appears more often in her vocal work. In the soundtrack for Kuri Yoji's cartoon *Aos* (1964), Ono's suggestive yelps are placed over Kuri's signature coarse animation, evoking humour in the absurdity of their juxtaposition. In general, when working with images of a sexual nature, Ono avoided using her voice, in order to maintain a critical distance. When Iimura Takahiko asked her to create the music for his film *Ai (Love)* (1962-63), she hung a microphone out of a window to accompany extreme close-ups of a couple having sex.

When she used her own body in the performance *Cut Piece* (1964), she maintained silence throughout, subordinating herself to the imperative to get the audience to participate. Sitting on stage, Ono invited her audience to cut away her clothes with scissors in any way they pleased. Staging her own objectification, the performance became a daring feminist statement and a portrait of sexual violence. As with her instruction-based works, Ono left the audience to determine the length of the performance and the course it would take. In Albert and David Maysles's eight-minute film of the performance (1965), one man is seen hurriedly cutting away at Ono's clothes. The camera captures her facial expression, her visible discomfort conveying a tension between the desire to stay true to her

*Ono's line 'I thought art was a verb, rather than a noun' encapsulated her stance on art but also toward her audience*

artistic intent and a fear of the unpredictability of human action. The proposition of the performance is straightforward, but its directness results in unexpected responses that foreground the fundamental conditions of performance art, the human potential for violence.

Yoko Ono's seminal film *Rape* (1969), made for Austrian TV, poses deep-rooted questions for cinema through a deceptively simple instruction. An enactment of one of her film scores, *Rape* is a feature-length experimental documentary that pushes film form into ethically charged confrontations. An all-male camera crew finds a young woman in a London cemetery and proceeds to follow her. Although the film doesn't provide us with any context, the woman is Eva Majlath, a 21-year-old Austrian, living illegally in Britain and speaking only a little English. Although she is initially flattered by the attention, the persistent harassment of the cameraman and crew begins to unsettle her. By the end, the intensity of her fear is palpable; she expresses confused rage as she is unable to escape her own apartment, into which the camera crew has locked her (keys were provided in advance by her sister).

Many interpreted the film as an artistic complaint about press intrusion into Lennon and Ono's lives. But, more broadly, the work is a feminist critique of the voyeuristic, male-centric gaze in cinema – a topic Laura Mulvey took up a few years later in her celebrated essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.' The camera's eye leading the implacable pursuit is the only gaze with which the viewer can identify, thus confronting us with our complicity. A gradual descent into a disturbing nightmare, *Rape* raises pertinent questions through language only available to cinema. The scores and conceptual films of Yoko Ono may be superficially simple, but they never fail to be profoundly confrontational. 



# TOUR DE FORCE

*The Family Jams* observes a bunch of retro-hippie folk rock musicians on the road – and in two cases, on the verge of stardom

By Frances Morgan

The life of the touring band has been mythologised on film in nostalgic dramas such as *Almost Famous* (2000) and numerous documentaries – most notably D.A. Pennebaker's film of Bob Dylan's 1965 UK tour, *Dont Look Back*, but also more impressionistic portraits such as Jem Cohen's films about Fugazi and The Ex. Aspects of all of these films inform Kevin Barker's *The Family Jams*, which has recently been released on DVD, though it was completed in 2009. It tells the story of a group of solo artists and one band touring small venues across the US in 2004. Two of those artists, Joanna Newsom and Devendra Banhart, were on the verge of becoming internationally successful; the band – Vetiver – and Barker himself (a film student at the time, he has released records under the name Currituck County), less so. This disparity is already felt, possibly acknowledged, in the film, but never spoils the romance of collective endeavour that the group earnestly enact, on and off stage. They jam on one another's songs and enthuse about their friends' performances. They know the countercultural family is a cliché, and a loaded one – Vetiver's Alissa Anderson and tour manager Zach laugh ruefully at a review that references the Manson 'family', and indeed Barker's film has the same name as a notorious 1970 album of Manson's songs. But it is a construct that sustains them nonetheless.

Real families are complicated. Barker begins the film with footage of his extended family gathering for his Hawaiian grandmother's 80th birthday party, but such concord is rare among his peers. In a section subtitled 'The Man Who Took Care of Me' (the title comes from Banhart's song 'The Charles C. Leary'), Banhart's stepfather, with whom he has a visibly close relationship, describes the young musicians as a generation who are "articulate, gentle...with an appreciation that the laws that have been given, the concepts that have been given, are no place to go". Shortly afterwards Banhart's biological father shows up to a gig: they are seen talking in silhouette but the conversation remains out of earshot. Talking to Barker about his parentage, Banhart, for the first and only time, loses the precocious, wide-eyed, studied cool with which he has so far charmed audiences and the viewer, and asks not to be filmed.

Another emotional jolt occurs when Newsom leaves the tour to attend the funeral of her closest childhood friend, who has been killed in a car accident. On her return she responds with tremulous, shellshocked grace to the compliments of a zealous fan. That night the other musicians conduct a rousing group singalong of her song 'Bridges and Balloons', an act of solidarity which seems to move her greatly but also hints at the oddness of becoming an artist in the public eye, of having one's creations take on such a life for other people while your



On the verge: Joanna Newsom, on tour in *The Family Jams*

own reality has been blasted by a sudden death. Driving to the next show, she catches sight of a small plane crashed by a roadside and clamps her hand over her mouth and cries out in anguish. She offers the explanation that her father flies for a hobby, but something far bigger lurks beneath the surface, and will soon find its way into her music – fans of Newsom will recognise the snippet of a new song that she plays in a hotel room as the main theme of 'Cosmia', from her expansive 2006 album *Ys* (Vetiver's singer Andy Cabic, talking with Alissa Anderson, presciently describes the fragment as "cinematic"). The song is dedicated to, and its lyrics inspired by, the death of Newsom's friend, and there is something uncanny in being present, however distantly, at this moment of its development.

Barker's own music may have remained below

*Tour time is a kind of dreamtime, in which strange coincidences and emotionally resonant moments are frequent*

the radar – and only briefly appears in *The Family Jams* – but he is a natural and fluent filmmaker. Shooting on a handheld camcorder bought just before the tour, he shows particular skill in capturing live music: his sound recording of these often lo-fi shows is likewise well-judged. Backstage, he maintains an unobtrusive presence. It helps that the musicians are comfortable with the camera: none of them tries to ignore it, which would betray unease. Instead, for all the vintage outfits, they're members of a generation



Kevin Barker (with guitar), Newsom (with harp)



Devendra Banhart at a record-store gig



that, by 2004, was more and more used to being looked at and to seeing themselves. It is just pre- the omniscient camera eye of Facebook and Instagram, though: “Is this for the internet?” someone asks of a group photo that’s being taken; only ten years later, the question seems quaint.

There is an unselfconscious eccentricity to some scenes, one of which plays out like a dreamy Harmony Korine sequence: taking a break at a truck stop, Anderson is filling a cooler with cans of beer when she notices a dragonfly perched on an ice cube. She and Cabic take it over to Banhart, who is sitting on the concrete, strumming his guitar, shirtless (as he is for much of the film) and a little spaced out. “It just... appeared,” she says in wonder. The insect perches on her finger and then Banhart’s, but won’t fly away. After an agonisingly long moment, it drifts off up into the sky, towards grey clouds and a Shell sign. No one says a word, but the reference is clear – Banhart’s song ‘Dragonflies’ (“Every time we drink beer/ Dragonflies appear”). Tour time is a kind of dreamtime, in which strange coincidences and emotionally resonant moments are frequent; captured in the beautifully flat shades of the camcorder, this tour is effortlessly cinematic.

It is yet another moment that affirms Banhart’s specialness, which is asserted throughout the film with lingering close-ups of the singer in performance and, between times, in full anecdotal flow. Joanna Newsom – who recently played the sybil-narrator Sortilège in Paul Thomas Anderson’s adaptation of *Inherent Vice* – keeps a low profile in comparison, communicating for the most part through her music, behind the tensile strings of her harp. Both, though, are greeted with a similar kind of wonder by audiences and well-known fans such as Antony Hegarty of Antony and the Johnsons, whose predictions of greatness have been confirmed by their respective careers: in a year’s time, Newsom would be an assured performer and composer scoring an album for full orchestra, and Banhart would be an indie star with an all-male band, distilling his witchy androgyny into pleasant folk-rock. These earliest performances are a reminder of how raw and strange their music seemed when it first emerged, with these voices, seemingly channelled from field-recorded folk and blues, yowling from young mouths, baroque lyrics affecting a pause within and a retreat from a modern world that seemed increasingly frenzied, apocalyptic, spiralling out of control. Was such a retreat merely escapist, or a necessary strategy to shore up connections not only between musical contemporaries but also with kindred spirits of the past?

When Banhart receives a signed copy of *America Over the Water*, English folk singer and collector Shirley Collins’s account of her apprenticeship with Alan Lomax in the 50s, he is honoured, as he is to meet singer Linda Perhacs, whose 1967 album *Parallelograms* is a cult classic for everyone on the tour. “I’m concerned about our world,” she tells him. “It’s your time.” In including such scenes, Barker makes a case for his friends’ performance of togetherness as far more than just nostalgic window-dressing, and more akin to a bewitchingly sincere kind of ancestor worship. ❸

## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

Familiarity and fire hazards could not ruin the luminous pleasures of the Nitrate Picture Show



By Geoff Brown

It’s a brave, or foolish, film festival that invites audiences to attend an event where the attractions are publicly announced only a few hours before the first screening. This was the tactic followed by the Nitrate Picture Show, which unfolded over a sun-kissed May weekend at George Eastman House museum and archive in Rochester, New York, before an international audience limited to 500 – the number of seats in the museum’s Dryden Theatre.

If I’d known in advance that the line-up would be dominated by repertoire warhorses, from *Casablanca* to *The Fallen Idol*, I might not have stepped on to the plane. Been there. Done that. Except of course that I hadn’t. What George Eastman House was offering was a rare chance to view films in old but still projectable nitrate prints – prints supposedly with the lustre and clarity of a full moon in a cloudless sky. Prints, too, whose combustibility, if provoked by projector friction or a careless cigarette, has given the film stock legendary status as something beautiful but dangerous, and whose nitrate base has a feel and odour all its own. Paolo Cherchi Usai, the festival’s director and a nitrate addict, once asked a perfume expert to enumerate the ingredients needed to replicate the golden smell. The list included camphor, cinnamon, and an essence derived from the pineal gland of an owl.

The weekend offered a potent demonstration of the immersive power of the communal viewing of projected film – a crucial lesson in an age when so many cinema projectors have been ripped out and replaced by tidy gleaming digital equipment. But did the nitrate magic strike? Were these famous films – the portentous, fabulous *Portrait of Jennie* (1948), DeMille’s fatuous but enjoyable *Samson and Delilah* (1949), the exotic fruit of *Black Narcissus* (1947), the hard slapstick of *Nothing Sacred* (1937) – really transformed and made new?

Yes, no, partially: the evidence was mixed, perhaps inevitable when practicalities and time limited the range of films. In *Casablanca* (1942) I marvelled at the inky blackness of Bogart’s bow tie, and the tears welling so luminously in Ingrid Bergman’s eyes. Yet the film’s pleasures remained fundamentally unaltered, rooted in script and performance, not the elements most susceptible to nitrate enhancement. A nitrate kick was particularly lacking from René Clément’s *Les Maudits* (1947), a wartime drama well worth watching, true – but what lustre can you get with a story mostly set on a submarine and photographed by Henri Alékan in three varieties of grey?

The magic rolled up with trumpets and

*I even felt like stroking David Farrar’s bare legs as he rode to and fro on his pony*



Deborah Kerr in *Black Narcissus*

drums in producer David O. Selznick’s own print of the Technicolor comedy *Nothing Sacred*, struck at the time of its original release in 1937. The jokes and horseplay may get less amusing as the film rolls on, yet with its extraordinary palette of muted browns, applied to suits and skyscrapers alike, we still sat entranced. I wanted to get up and lick the screen.

A restraining hand had to be applied, too, during Powell and Pressburger’s *Black Narcissus*, screened in a gorgeously textured Academy Film Archive print likely to have belonged to J. Arthur Rank. Even in erratically graded prints, P&P’s drama of hidden desires leaping out among vulnerable nuns in a Himalayan convent is a visual knockout; but the punch, along with many subtleties, was so much greater when every shade of colour, from peacock blues to frightening crimsons, throbbed with a sensuous charge. Why, I even felt like stroking David Farrar’s bare legs as he rode to and fro on his pony.

Other delights at this convivial weekend? Dieterle’s *Portrait of Jennie* for sure: another Selznick production, notably pretentious, but crafted with such skilful depictions of romantic anguish, otherworldliness, and rampaging weather – displayed in widescreen in Selznick’s unique print – that it was easy to fall under its spell. *Samson and Delilah* brought its own peculiar thrills. The gaudy colour made DeMille’s sets and tableaux look cheesier than ever, though it definitely boosted Hedy Lamarr’s provocative costumes and the grease-licked clumps of Victor Mature’s hair, so piquantly described by Lamarr’s Delilah as “black as a raven’s wing and wild as a storm”.

There was room for only a small portion of the audience to attend the weekend’s most fascinating spectacle – the creation of nitrate film from scratch before our amazed eyes. It was as if we were standing in the kitchen of the Kodak king, George Eastman; but instead of the ingredients for lemon pie, the staff gathered balls of cotton, nitric acid and various solvents, the product of which – nitrocellulose – was cast on a small glass plate. Dried and stripped off, the result carried the scent of camphor and was as flexible and clear as clingfilm. With more of the stuff and a match, we could all have been toast. But we survived to see another film – and to attend the Nitrate Picture Show next year. ❹



## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

Oberhausen's Short Film Festival may be approaching pensionable age, but it is still full of youthful vitality and innovation

By **Andréa Picard**

Having reached the milestone of a 60th anniversary last year, for its 61st edition the International Short Film Festival Oberhausen added an extra dimension: a 3D programme, following on the heels of Godard's *Goodbye to Language*. Each spring the six-day festival attracts filmmakers, programmers, curators, distributors of artists' film and video, archivists, critics and academics from around the world, alongside a stream of giddy German children. Oberhausen, in the Ruhr, has become a notable meeting-ground for those invested in the moving image. But while the festival is famous for its links to the avant garde, its approach to the short film format is resolutely democratic: the International Competition features all genres and lengths that fit that designation, and each entry must be viewed by the jury on the monumental screen in the Lichtburg cinema. In-depth discussion is encouraged through post-screening meetings with the filmmakers and a series of panel discussions (called 'Podium'); discussion is also promoted as the mission of the second annual Oberhausen Seminar, a joint venture with the Robert Flaherty Film Seminar in New York City and Lux, an international agency for the promotion of artists' moving images, based in London and Glasgow.

A state of heightened criticality spills over into lobby chatter and convivial late nights. Festival staff emphasise the event's non-commercial nature; even so, the stakes are high, and the selection is scrutinised for strengths, weaknesses and curatorial cohesion – a reflection of Oberhausen's success in inviting a high level of discourse around moving image practice. The festival continues to evolve: in the past decade, the competition has arguably been eclipsed by the thematic programmes and filmmaker profiles – tight curation means their quality is often more reliable.

I count myself one of the devotees of the themes, and usually dip in and out of the competition, but this year I was invited to join the jury and for the first time saw all the titles in contention, while most of my colleagues were two cinemas over, fiddling with 3D glasses. The list featured 59 films from 31 countries (reportedly selected from over 4500 submissions from 98 countries), grouped within 10 programmes. Many of the strongest films in this line-up were on the longer side of short – short shorts seem now to be largely an emblem of 70s fashion, becoming ever more rare on the festival circuit. The longer entries included the Indian director Payal Kapadia's enchanting, enigmatic animist tale *The Last Mango Before the Monsoon*, which earned a special mention and the FIPRESCI prize, and *Tiempo Aire*, by the multi-disciplinary Mexican artist Bruno Varela, a devastating indictment of violence in Mexico and Bolivia, which won the inaugural e-flux Prize for its layered portrait of



Deadpan melancholia: Wojciech Bakowski's *Sound of My Soul*

resilience and its complex mediation of images. But the Grand Prize went to a relatively succinct 13-minute, deep violet-inflected video: Wojciech Bakowski's *Sound of My Soul* is a deceptively simple, somewhat subdued and wholly restorative rejoinder to most so-called post-internet art.

Bakowski – the subject of one of Oberhausen's filmmaker profiles last year – is a young Polish poet, musician and video artist who has recently found success in North America, where a three-city tour of his videos exposed new audiences to his charmingly idiosyncratic brand of deadpan melancholia. *Sound of My Soul* deftly uses pop iconography and global, visual symbols, while remaining characteristically and mischievously introverted: the video combines big blocks of purple colour, the refrain from a Spandau Ballet song that supplies its title, and the artist's own poetry, spoken and appearing as text on screen, interspersed with laconic live-action scenes retextured by uncanny, lo-fi animation. A sly commentary on communication in the age of social media – the use of emoticons, perfunctory and distracted messages – and its attendant breakdowns, Bakowski's film displayed more nuanced humour than his earlier videos, and a notable progression in style. His win shows Oberhausen's success in discovering new talent and its willingness to take risks on emerging bodies of work.

Some recurring themes could be traced: religious processions and rituals, diaries and portraits. The young Austrian artist Antoinette Zwirchmayr's lovely 16mm silent miniature, *House and Universe*, radiated a sensual calm as it studied the contours of the female form; Josef Dabernig's pleasantly eccentric *Zlaté Piesky Rocket Launch*, shot in black-and-white 35mm, starring his daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren and bolstered by a kid-friendly hip-hop soundtrack,

*Wojciech Bakowski's win shows Oberhausen's success in discovering new work and their willingness to take risks*

delighted in strange symmetries as much as in the off-kilter. Pauline Julier's gorgeously filmed portrait of Tuvalu, *The Disappearances of Aitus*, was arguably the competition's cinematic apogee, though it suffered from a problematic text. Almost as beautiful was Zhou Tao's *Blue and Red*, a dual portrait of revellers in an LED-lit, science-fictional Guangzhou square and protesters in Bangkok, its politics coated in aesthetic abstraction and alluring enigmas.

Surprisingly, each of the 10 programmes I watched in the competition was more cohesive than the one 3D programme I saw. The range of this programme was somewhat mystifying – from avant-garde masters like Paul Sharits (whose mesmerising *3D-Movie* from 1975 – an eight-minute *tour de force* of scrambling red and blue film grain contained within a sculptural, 3D black webbing – was the highlight of my Oberhausen experience) to slick music videos. The programme was overlong, wildly inconsistent, even headache inducing, and made all the more exhausting by the constant switching of glasses to suit different kinds of 3D. There were gems in the theme programme, as well as films which perhaps did not strictly adhere to the definition of 3D, sparking endless debate.

One of the great additions to the festival in recent years has been the Archive series, in which a number of archivists or representatives from important film archives around the world present recent discoveries, restorations or preservations from their collection. This year's line-up was stellar, bringing together the BFI, the Academy Film Archive, the Austrian Film Museum and the National Film Center Tokyo. Their cache of eclectic restorations – from John Maybury's post-punk super 8 and 16mm films starring Siouxie Sioux, to bizarre black-and-white commercials anonymously directed by Peter Kubelka in 1963 and a host of rare experimental Japanese films from Japan's Amateur Film Club – together with the near-unbridled enthusiasm and expertise shared during the screenings, were enough to convince any jaded festival-goer that film's history – and its present and future – are alive and kicking in any and all dimensions. **Ⓢ**



# BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

In the 1970s Parviz Kimiavi was the brightest star in Iran's New Wave, but since then his films have all but vanished. We've been missing out

**By Sukhdev Sandhu**

For decades Parviz Kimiavi's slender filmography – just three full-length features and only a few more shorts – has existed mostly as exalted memory, as rumour, as promise. "Growing up in Iran in the 1980s there was an image from Parviz Kimiavi's *The Mongols* that I was obsessed with," the Brooklyn-based film scholar Hadi Gharabaghi recalls. "It was of a Mongol standing in a desert in front of a broken-down structure, an empty door. It was crazy, mysterious. But there was no way to see the actual film. You could get any porno or Hollywood film on VHS from one of Tehran's bazaars. But not *The Mongols*. Not any of Kimiavi's films. For me and my friends they were gods. After all, what is God? Something you can't see!"

Even more than directors such as Bahram Beyzai and Sohrab Shahid Saless, Kimiavi was the brightest star of the Iranian New Wave that flourished in the wake of Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cow* (1969). His work was visually dazzling, formally hybrid, politically complex. It emerged at the same time that a newly founded Tehran Film Festival was being likened by journalists to a 'Cannes of the Middle East'. Meanwhile the annual Festival of Arts at Shiraz was commissioning performances by Peter Brook, Merce Cunningham and John Cage and becoming, claimed *Artforum*, "one of the most adventurous and idiosyncratic festivals in the world". The state was talking up modernisation, but Kimiavi was hatching a singular form of Iranian modernism steeped in indigenous energies and dreamscapes rather than aping the semi-petrified poetics of international avant-gardism.

Born in 1939 in the north-eastern city of Neyshabur, he moved to France as a student in the late 50s, studying at the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) before working at the Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française. He returned to Iran in 1968, where he was employed by National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT). His early shorts were immediately arresting: *Oh, Protector of the Gazelle* (1970) is a portrait of the lamentation rituals at the shrine of imam Reza in the city of Mashhad. It features a mysterious dissolve from courtyard sweepers' brooms to the building's gilded ceiling, often focuses on the toes or mouths of the mourners, and makes extraordinary use of sound – including sudden cut-outs and the electronic post-production that would also be a hallmark of his later films. The result is a haunting, immersive threnody where space and time are expanded and unsettled.

Even more resonant is *P Like Pelican* (1972) which depicts a hermit (non-actor Agha Mirza) who has lived among ruins for 40 years and is regularly tormented by young kids hurling



Door to nowhere: Parviz Kimiavi's *The Mongols* (1973)

*There are echoes of Jodorowsky, Antonioni and Buñuel, and a sound design that recalls the BBC Radiophonic Workshop*


stones at him. Characteristically, the film skips between documentary, ethnography and performance piece. It's passionately alive to the keening melodies and near-balletic movements of the old man even as he's been attacked.


Just as with the deaf-blind dervish in the feature-length *The Garden of the Stones* (1976), it's unclear whether Mirza is crazy, a diviner or a visionary. In the rhythm of their refusals, their semi-detachment from the imperatives of modern life, the alternative melodies and apparitions to which they have access, Kimiavi's outcasts, without ever being sentimentalised, always seem emancipated.

Few of the Iranian filmmakers who sought to sidestep post-Revolution censorship by

focusing on young children would do so with the acuity Kimiavi shows in *P Like Pelican*. Nor did many directors conjure up an image quite as rich and luminous as the one at the end of the film, of the hermit knee-deep in water and clinging to a pelican.

*The Mongols* (1973) is Kimiavi's masterpiece. Self-reflexive and satirical, full of incredible image-making, streaming with allusions and allegory, it features Kimiavi himself as a television producer working on a history of cinema who gets sent to a remote desert town where microwave towers are being constructed. The film links the arrival of television in modern Iran with the Mongols' invasion of the region centuries earlier. There are spatial, surreal echoes of Jodorowsky, Antonioni and Buñuel; a sound design that recalls the BBC Radiophonic Workshop; and dazzlingly inventive sequences, including one in which Kimiavi's character gets guillotined and, rather than his head, a can of 35mm film rolls away.

Like many of his fellow Iranian directors, Kimiavi struggled after the 1979 Revolution. The masters of his films had been locked up by the Islamic Republic and, back in Paris, severed from the skies and soil that had magicked him and which he in turn ensorcelled, he made only a handful of unexceptional films for television. In recent years though, his work has started to leak on to the internet. It's been picked up by the art world – screened by key journals such as *Bidouin* and at Beirut Arts Centre. Kinetic, hallucinatory, gloriously unplaceable: it demands a re-imagining not just of Middle Eastern film history, but of international art cinema. 

 **Tate Modern, London is screening the films of Parviz Kimiavi from Friday 19-Sunday 21 June**



Parviz Kimiavi





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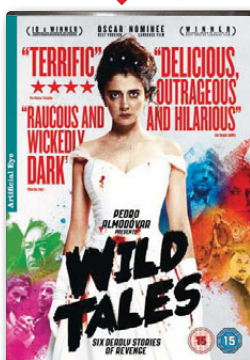
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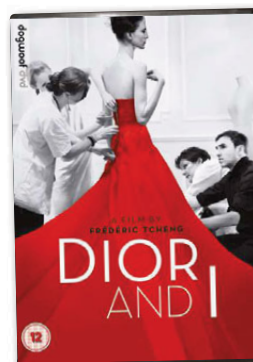


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# Reviews



## 92 **West**

*It's a strength of the film that director Christian Schwochow avoids easy closure and ready answers – uncertainty and insecurity are built into the system on both sides of the Iron Curtain*



**62** Films of the month



**68** Films



**94** Home Cinema



**104** Books



## Amy

United Kingdom 2015

Director: Asif Kapadia

See Feature  
on page 34

### Reviewed by Jane Giles

North London, 1998. Shaky home video captures three 14-year-old girls sitting on the stairs. It's someone's birthday and they're messing around, getting ready, licking lollipops. The girls start to sing 'Happy Birthday to You'. And then, and then... *that voice*. The voice of Ella Fitzgerald or Billie Holiday coming out of a skinny little white girl with buck teeth. It's a killer opening; less than a minute into the film and I'm already choking back tears. There's no spoiler alert needed here – surely everyone knows that the precociously talented girl who was Amy Winehouse would be dead by 27, a member along with Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison, Brian Jones and Kurt Cobain of what Cobain's mother called "that stupid club". It was all over the press, and her death was deeply affecting to millions.

As with Asif Kapadia's documentary *Senna* (2010), *Amy* is composed almost entirely of archive footage, with no talking heads or single overarching commentary. We hear from a large cast of characters – Amy's parents, friends and collaborators, such as Mark Ronson, Yasiin Bey (the former Mos Def) and Salaam Remi, plus some wise words from doctors and drug counsellor Chip Somers – who are credited as they speak, though the director keeps his own name off the picture until the very end. The effect of this is to make Amy seem not only the subject but the author of her own story; *Amy* utilises a very wide range of types of film footage – archive, mobile phone, news, home video – and she's in almost every frame, her voice heard throughout. Ironically it's Amy who seems to be the one vibrantly alive; the unseen interviewees are a chorus of ghosts in the background, particularly the barely-there whisper of her notorious ex Blake Fielder-Civil, the man who inspired *Back to Black*, the break-up album that changed everything.

Amy was born in 1983, and the film whizzes quickly through her childhood, probably due to a relative scarcity of relevant footage from this time. Noting the unhappiness that came with her parents' separation, we see that by her early teens she was on antidepressants, and at 15 bulimic. She was desperate to leave home because "You can't smoke weed all day in your mum's house"; as soon as she earned a bit of cash she got her own flat with a girlfriend in East Finchley. Her debut album *Frank* (2003) was well received, and her career began to take off. It was when she moved to Camden Town that things got messy. She hung out in The Good Mixer pub and at the club Trash with The Libertines and The Kills, but most of all embarked on an obsessive affair with Blake. Amy followed him into hard drug use because she wanted to feel what he was feeling, but he eventually dumped her to go back to his partner. The film's centrepiece is a fascinating sequence in which Amy records the vocal for the title track of *Back to Black* in 2006. She is standing alone in what seems to be a makeshift booth; the scene is stripped of instrumental music, and the focus is on the clarity of her heartbroken lyrics and the pain in her voice. At the end she remarks on the sadness of the song as if she's listening to



The tattooed lady: Amy Winehouse

someone else or hearing it for the first time.

In *Amy* 'the voice' is augmented by the word, and the visuals are often overlaid with writing. Amy's childish handwriting, covered in little love hearts, floats across the screen, and the poetry of her lyrics is written out for us to read as the songs play, resonating deeply with what we know to have been going on in her life. In addition to onscreen credits that keep track of who's speaking, Kapadia continually documents place names and key dates, as Amy

*In 2003, she predicted that she wouldn't be able to handle fame: 'I'd go mad,' she said. And go mad she did, amid the full attention of the British press*

gets back with Blake, marries him in 2007 and divorces a couple of years later. The events feel uncomfortably close to home as, more or less chronologically, the film moves inexorably towards Amy's relatively recent death.

"You sound common," said Jonathan Ross in an early interview, referring to Amy's remarkable speaking voice. "Thanks?" she laughs, surprised, perhaps a bit offended, but taking it as a compliment in the face of his identification and approval. Like her best mates Jules and Lauren, the teenagers sitting on the stairs, she was a 'gobby girl' with a strong London accent who didn't seem particularly to want or need the mega-stardom that rose up around her. In 2003, she predicted that she wouldn't be able to handle fame: "I'd go mad," she said. And go mad she did, amid the full attention of the British press, a million flashbulbs exploding in her face, her plight fodder for chat-show comedians. We see the paparazzi in



a feeding frenzy outside her home – they knock her over in the scrum, then tell her to “cheer up”.

This is a film about ‘the voice’ augmented by the word, but it’s also about the image, and Kapadia makes powerful use of still photography, whether pictures stolen by the paparazzi, studio portraits, snapshots or selfies. The presence of so many little-known images indicates the sheer number of pictures taken of Amy; we see the child become a young woman (“Stop filming my spots!” she complains to a friend), then an icon and increasingly a caricature of her own stylised image. As the film documents Amy’s first crisis of drug addiction, a potentially playful image of her sticking out her tongue is undermined by a coating of thick grey-green mucus, and Kapadia holds the shot for much longer than we would wish. Contemplating Amy’s madness, the director uses a set of raw photographs that invoke portraits of Victorian asylum inmates. Well-chosen archive footage documents the processes of photography: a creepy film of Amy and Blake posing for the fashion photographer Terry Richardson (since the subject of allegations of sexual assault); the paparazzi grabbing shots of Amy in shock outside Pentonville prison after Blake is arrested; and unwanted television cameras capturing a complex family altercation, Amy’s father Mitch agreeing to let a couple of tourist fans take a snap as she attempts to get away from it all on a remote beach.

By the time of the 2008 Grammys, Amy is drug-free and on stage in London, video-linked to the ceremony in Los Angeles as her idol Tony Bennett arrives to present the award for Best Record. “Dad! It’s Tony Bennett,” cries a star-struck Amy, and her jaw is on the floor when he announces her as the winner. The room explodes. But then, on what looks like the greatest night of anyone’s life, a girlfriend recounts how Amy took her backstage to confide that it was boring without drugs. “I don’t want to die,” Amy said, but even when drug-free she was drinking heavily to anaesthetise herself. Terrible live performances at the Eden Project and Bestival prefigure a final nightmare show, when Amy sits down silently on stage in Belgrade. The crowd’s cheers turn to boos, jeers and commands: “Just sing.”

Jules recounts that Amy sounded her old self again when she unexpectedly rang in late July 2011 to apologise for her bad behaviour. But the following day she was dead from alcohol poisoning, found by her bodyguard in bed as if sleeping, her heart weakened by years of drug abuse and bulimia. News cameras quickly gathered around the house in Camden to capture the sight of a body bag being taken away, as young women in the crowd outside wept, “Rest in peace Amy.” We see the people we’ve come to recognise through this film – Amy’s friends, family and collaborators – devastated, arriving and gathering at her funeral, where the men’s kippahs remind us for the first time of her faith. Among other things, Judaism prohibits tattoos, and Amy became one of the most famous tattooed ladies of all time.

Midway, the film becomes gruelling, and the endless chaotic flashlights and dizzying mobile-phone visuals hard to bear. There are some shocking images in this desperately sad, judicious but overlong film, which itself could be read as part of the problem – a symptom of the public’s endless appetite for misery and seeing stars self-destruct. But while walking this fine line, ultimately the film neither wallows in Amy’s fate nor glamorises her tragedy. All of this makes



**‘A gobby girl with a strong London accent’: a pre-stardom Amy Winehouse**

Amy essential viewing, not least for the audience of young women who will be drawn to it. If it’s distressing to watch, imagine how it felt to be her.

Documentaries are often more suited to television than cinema but, like *Senna* with its drive for speed and sound of roaring engines, *Amy* is definitely one for the big screen: big eyes, big hair, big eyeliner, big sound. On screen, the film’s title is her name in big bold capital letters and it packs a huge emotional impact. With the rights to her music controlled by Mitch Winehouse, Amy’s story will surely become a biopic one day, like most of the others in ‘that stupid club’. But it’s hard to imagine that a significantly different version will be told, because from his multiple interviewees and the vast amount of archive, Kapadia has drawn together a single but collective point of view: Amy was an adult, not a child. She liked alcohol and drugs. The paparazzi are awful. And she was one of the greats. 📺

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
James Gay-Rees  
**Cinematographers**  
UK:  
Ernesto Herrmann  
Rafael Bettega  
NY:  
Jake Clennell  
Miami:  
Carlos De Varona  
**Editor**  
Chris King  
**Original Music**

Antonio Pinto  
**Supervising Sound Editor**  
Andy Shelley  
Stephen Griffiths  
  
©Universal Music  
Operations Limited  
**Production Companies**  
Globe Productions  
presents an On  
The Corner film

in association  
with Film4  
**Executive Producers**  
David Joseph  
Adam Barker

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Altitude

Home-movie footage, archive material, stills, testimonials and music recordings document the story of Amy Winehouse, the influential North London singer who recorded two albums, *Frank* (2003) and *Back to Black* (2006). Unable to handle fame, she struggled with addictions, an eating disorder and a toxic relationship under the relentless gaze of the media, until her death aged 27 in 2011.



## Black Coal, Thin Ice

China/Hong Kong 2014

Director: Diao Yinan

Certificate 15 109m 32s

### Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

The existential detective narrative is anything but a new concept – examples both classic (*Kiss Me Deadly*) and contemporary (*Inherent Vice*) are scattered across the history of cinema. Meanwhile television shows such as *True Detective* have brought the subgenre to its highest level of ubiquity yet, assimilating it once and for all into popular culture at large. Chinese filmmaker Diao Yinan's *Black Coal, Thin Ice*, winner of the Golden Bear at the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival, while certainly of a piece with this cerebral lineage and its modern-day equivalents, approaches its metaphysical concerns from an especially unique and oblique angle. Set in Heilongjiang Province in northeast China, the film opens in 1999 as body parts of dismembered corpses inexplicably begin to turn up in various coal-processing trucks and factories throughout the region. Assigned to investigate this gruesome case is detective Zhang Zili (Liao Fan), a brusque, temperamental man whose search for the killer culminates at the end of the film's circumscribed first act with two dead partners, a gunshot wound to the chest and a stint in hospital.

When we meet Zhang again five years later, he has retreated into alcoholism and, unable to maintain his professional decorum, has been suspended from police duty. But soon a fresh pair of murders reminiscent of the 1999 case reawaken his curiosity, sending him on a rogue investigation of the events, which in turn brings his own buried emotional traumas to the fore. Zhang's primary focus of interest is the widowed Wu Zhizhen (Gwei Lun Mei), a laundry clerk whose personal and romantic involvement with each of the victims appears to hold the key to unlocking the mystery at the heart of the atrocities. Much of the ensuing, slow-burning drama unfolds around the dry cleaners where Wu works, as Zhang returns again and again in hopes of gathering concrete evidence about the identity and whereabouts of the assailant. At first irritated and resistant to Zhang's interest and advances, Wu soon finds an odd sense of comfort in his company, and their relationship quickly grows intimate, two lonely souls alleviating, if only temporarily, each other's unarticulated pain.

A seemingly familiar tale of emotional and sexual dependency, Diao's third feature is rendered strange and intoxicating by the director's methodical pacing and duplex narrative structure, proceeding from passages of macabre violence to sequences of surreal imagery and tense encounters pregnant with parallel meaning and suppressed passions. We know little of Zhang, save for his marital status, which we glean from an early scene in which he assaults his estranged wife after she hands him their divorce papers; and as he gets closer and closer to finding the killer, his own identity seems to recede from view, so that he eventually becomes, like Wu, an abstraction in the film's cleverly nested formal strategy. "It was dumb luck, I was stumbling around in the dark," he mutters at one point towards the end of the film. Like much of the exposition, this hints at ambiguous purpose and unforeseen consequence – and as such, can be read as a reiteration of the character's aimless professional odyssey as



Washed up: Wu Zhizhen (Gwei Lun Mei) is a laundry clerk who may hold the key to the mystery

much as a reflection of his inner personal plight. Diao (who also wrote the original screenplay) depicts this quest as a physical journey through a nocturnal wilderness, a contemporary *noir* with a weary, spiritual undertow.

There's something unsettlingly suggestive yet alluring about the film's wintry, neon-streaked images, and Diao, in a confident and resourceful display of craftsmanship, tells his highly symbolic story largely through visuals and carefully delineated spatial arrangements. His compositions are starkly decorated yet colourfully variegated, with splashes of radiant

tints and iridescent hues emanating from fixtures and fluorescents tucked within the deep shadows of the film's urban backdrop. The cinematography, by Dong Jingsong, captures the intensity of the colours to the point of hallucinatory, as his camera remains fixed on inexpressive faces and abandoned, snow-draped city streets. When the camera moves, it is with a kind of unconscious investment in the action, tracking behind the actors as they make their way through busy interior spaces and cramped alleyways. One shot, following Zhang as he navigates a bustling billiards hall, builds an



True detective: investigator Zhang (Liao Fan)



Partners in crime: Zhang and Wu





*The film moves from passages of macabre violence to sequences of surreal imagery and tense encounters pregnant with meaning*

stably the city's icy landscapes, work in tandem to disorient the viewer's perception and assumed understanding of the events in question. The result is a succession of dreamlike sequences that, with their heightened atmosphere and expressive artificiality, seem to sit just outside traditional conceptions of reality. Thus, when violence does erupt – as in a scene where Zhang's friend and former partner is brutally sliced with an ice skate – it registers as that much more visceral.

While not a macguffin in the manner of a traditional thriller, the murder plot of the film is eventually understood to be of somewhat secondary concern, as Zhang attempts to use the case as a means to melt the cold façade of Wu and in the process restore a bit of purpose to his own existence. The initial mystery is solved just over halfway through the film, and from there Zhang is left to embark on his own internal pilgrimage, as a different antagonist is slowly revealed to be of greater danger to him and to those in his vicinity. Soon, a number of disparate clues and closing revelations summon the characters to the Daylight Fireworks Club, which stands opulent and imposing in the moonlight, haunting the background of many scenes (including one especially stunning set piece, shot from atop a Ferris wheel) as suspicious activity transpires within.

It's by way of this sly reorientation of intrigue that Diao is able to hint at his film's more politically damning subtext; the social malaise that seems to grip his vision of modern China gives way to a final scene in which an unseen delinquent sets off fireworks from the rooftops while the police scramble helplessly in the streets below. Besides literalising the film's Chinese title (which translates as 'Daylight Fireworks'), this enigmatic finale pushes the film in one last unanticipated direction, suggesting a cyclical, inexorable pattern of cultural paralysis at work both within and outside the narrative – a new day, a new drama. **S**

internal tension as the camera snakes through dimly lit corridors only to arrive at nothing in particular. An earlier sequence, by contrast, contracts the film's five-year jump in time into a single travelling shot through a highway tunnel, beginning at one end of the underpass in 1999 and ending in 2004 as the camera emerges into the light, circling around to find Zhang drunk on the side of the road next to his motorcycle, before switching perspectives mid-shot to follow a second man riding off with our hero's vehicle.

Diao elicits a considerable amount of wry humour from these moments and through other visual ironies, which go some way towards offsetting the film's pervasive darkness (literal and figurative). There's an absurdity to much of the choreography, generating a dissonance between the film's grisly themes and its serene framings without disrupting Diao's expertly crafted tonal infrastructure. For example, the early scene in which Zhang is shot and wounded, set in a gaudily lit and decorated hair salon, takes on elements of slapstick comedy as characters lunge off screen and objects roll into the frame while the camera remains motionless, appearing in its stationary stance to comment indirectly on the absurdity of the

proceedings. Elsewhere, odd juxtapositions, such as the inexplicable appearance of a horse in an otherwise unassuming indoor locale, and pratfalls featuring characters unable to traverse

#### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Vivian Qu  
Wan Juan  
**Written by**  
Diao Yinan  
**Director of Photography**  
Dong Jinsong  
**Editor**  
Yang Hongyu  
**Art Director**  
Liu Qiang

**Composer**  
Wen Zi  
**Sound**  
Zhang Yang  
Li Danfeng  
  
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Movie Co., Ltd.  
/ Boneyard  
Entertainment  
China (BEC) Ltd.  
(Hong Kong)

**Production Companies**  
Presented by Omnijoi  
Media Corporation  
Co., Ltd., Boneyard  
Entertainment  
China (BEC) Limited  
(Hong Kong), China  
Film Co., Ltd.  
**Executive Producers**  
Bu Yu  
Daniel Jonathan Victor

Han Samping  
Hong Tao  
Han Xiaoli

**Cast**  
**Liao Fan**  
Zhang Zili  
**Gwei Lun Mei**  
Wu Zhizhen  
**Wang Xuebing**  
Liang Zhijun

**Wang Jingchun**  
Rong Rong  
**Yu Ailei**  
Captain Wang  
**Ni Jingyang**  
Su Lijuan

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited  
  
Mandarin  
theatrical title  
**Bai Ri Yan Huo**

**Manchuria, 1999. Dismembered human body parts begin to turn up in the city's coal-processing facilities. Detective Zhang, recently divorced, begins the search for the murderer, leading to a violent confrontation with a group of suspects which leaves him unable to continue the investigation.**

**Five years later Zhang is unable to retain his rank owing to alcoholism. When a series of new murders similar to the prior case begin to plague the city, Zhang takes on his own, independent investigation of the killings. He becomes obsessed with Wu, a mysterious**

**woman with links to the murdered men who works at a local laundry.**

**The two soon become intimate, their relationship growing more complicated as Wu's true identity as an accomplice in the murders begins to reveal itself, following the violent death of Zhang's friend and former partner. When a coat from a half decade earlier resurfaces at the laundry as a key piece of evidence, Zhang tracks its owner to the Daylight Fireworks Club, prompting Wu to admit her role in the murders. The police arrest Wu.**



## The Look of Silence

Denmark/Norway/Finland/United Kingdom/  
USA/Germany/The Netherlands 2014

Director: Joshua Oppenheimer

Certificate 15 103m 29s

See Feature  
on page 38

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"You asked much deeper questions than Joshua ever did," the old man being fitted for glasses says to his interlocutor Adi, a door-to-door

ophthalmologist working around the village of Medan. The old man, Inong, is uncomfortable. He has just been talking about his participation in Indonesia's anti-communist purge of 1965-66, in which he was a death-squad leader. He has offered up his memories, describing the taste of blood ("both salty and sweet"), as well as his memory of what a woman's sawn-off breast looks like ("a coconut-milk filter"). This is a unique insight that not everyone is privy to, but his questioner seems insufficiently grateful for what he's being offered and the conversation becomes standoffish. Unbeknown to Inong, Adi's older brother Ramli was one of hundreds of 'undesirables' in the area listed as communists – that's to say any enemies of the government installed after the military coup – who were rounded up, butchered and unceremoniously dumped in the Snake River, just some of the million who disappeared nationwide. In fact, only a couple of years before Adi was born, Inong murdered Ramli with his own hands.

The Joshua referred to is Joshua Oppenheimer who, with *The Look of Silence*, has now produced his second film about the legacy of the purge killings, following 2012's lauded *The Act of Killing*. In that film, Oppenheimer handled the interviewing duties himself, in the process of collaborating with small-time gangsters-turned-mass-murderers Anwar Congo and Adi Zulkadry as they produced a cinematic spectacular re-enacting their endeavours, casting themselves as *Guns and Dolls* toughs in a community theatre as truth and reconciliation committee project that called into question both truth and reconciliation. In *The Look of Silence*, Oppenheimer has a new collaborator, Adi Rukun, who belongs by birth to the losing side of the putsch a half century ago, and who is both ennobled by its vanquishing and irreparably wounded by it. Aside from being a metaphor for historical myopia that would be considered much too on-the-nose in fiction filmmaking, Adi's profession gives him a pretext to enter homes and make 'small talk', and a means to keep his subject captive behind a portable phoropter.

Adi gives Oppenheimer an onscreen moral anchor. The 'look' referred to in the title belongs to him. It's his expression as we watch him watching the testimony of the killers on a small television set, much as Congo watched the rushes of his film in *The Act of Killing*. It's the deadpan front he puts on as he listens to the killers, the very same men who spoke proudly to Oppenheimer of their actions, openly contradicting what they have happily confessed to elsewhere, as he lets them flounder in dead air or resort to thinly veiled threats.

Oppenheimer is Texas-born, Denmark-based, educated at Harvard and Central St Martin's, London, and fluent in the Indonesian language, but he is not and will never be Indonesian. His outsider status is the fundamental difference between *The Act of Killing* and the identifiable



A history of violence: Oppenheimer's collaborator, the ophthalmologist Adi, pictured with his mother

precedents, films that invite their subjects' active participation as a form of covert interrogation – for example, Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann's *The Laughing Man* (1966), starring ex-Nazi soldier of fortune Siegfried Müller, or Robert Kramer and Thomas Harlan's *Our Nazi* (1984), in which the son of anti-Semitic filmmaker Veit Harlan lured former SS-Obersturmbannführer Dr Alfred Filbert into a movie project that was actually a trap. More recently, one can point to Eliane Raheb's excellent piecing together of the Lebanese Civil War's wreckage *Sleepless Nights*, released the same year as *The Act of Killing* but overshadowed by that film's celebrity endorsements from Errol Morris and Werner Herzog.

Oppenheimer's outsider status, aside from giving him access to high-profile backers and a safety his intrepid collaborators don't enjoy, confers other advantages. Among these is his privileged vantage on national myth-making – he draws out certain phrases that recur with clockwork regularity, as though multiple subjects, without consulting, are working from the same well-memorised script. In *The Act of Killing*, it's the repetition of the fact that the word 'gangster' means 'free man'; in *The Look of Silence*, it's the idea that the purge was a "spontaneous action of the people", a phrase mouthed numerous times without ever once being stated with conviction. These are words that convey silent consent: "I never knew..."

Coming as it does on the heels of *The Act of Killing*, *The Look of Silence* may be received as a

'sequel' to that film, or perhaps a means to address the few criticisms that accompanied the almost unanimous praise it received, the spirit of most of these being that in starring the perpetrators of atrocities it did a disservice to the victims. The chronology with which the films were made complicates matters. Oppenheimer began filming in Indonesia in 2004; this is apparently when he shot the footage, which we see at the beginning and throughout the movie, of Inong and his murderous partner Amir Hasan on the banks of the Snake River, discussing their actions and even pantomiming re-enactments with the kind of recall that suggests these are cherished memories. One might say that *The Act of Killing* and *The Look of Silence*, having developed on parallel tracks, are two halves of a diptych – or uneasy neighbours, like the former members of the Komando Aksi killing squads and their families, and the families of their victims.

If we allow the wisdom of the idea that the past is another country, then Adi is also a foreigner in his way, since the events he's inquiring about occurred before he came into the world, though they profoundly shape the present. But 50 years is a long time. The bereaved and the triumphant have both grown old. Some, like Hasan, died peacefully before Adi had the chance to confront them. Hasan is 'present' through interview material filmed by Oppenheimer, as well as in the form of an illustrated diary in which he depicted his actions in the "heroic struggle". The purpose of creating such a keepsake, he says in one of the videos, was "so people will remember





*The death-squad member Inong explains that the executioners drank their victims' blood during the killings to prevent themselves from going insane afterwards*

us... Our descendants". Later, however, when Adi presents this piece of physical evidence to Hasan's surviving family, they reject it outright. In *The Act of Killing*, Oppenheimer put killers off balance by encouraging them to play-act; in *The Look of Silence*, he indulges a common fondness for karaoke and musical performance. "Why should I spin yarn if in the end the yarn will be cut?" Hasan sings in one of the film's first images. "Why should I remember if remembering only breaks my heart?"

People, like nations, remember what they want to remember, while the past is only as

far off as we make it. Adi's father – toothless, hairless, his usually unclothed body resembling a bundle of dry sticks – says he is 17 years old, while Adi's mother reckons he must be closer to 140. When asked if he remembers Ramli, the old man scarcely understands the question. The only time we see Adi's cool resolve falter is when he is speaking to one of the killers in the presence of the man's daughter. The killer's memory is sharp when recounting his exploits but otherwise he is gone: "Senile," the daughter says. Adi offers her and the old man forgiveness, though there's something ironic in giving this gift to someone unequipped to understand what they're being given, or even what they're being forgiven for.

No such absolution comes to Inong, who explains that the executioners drank their victims' blood during the killings to prevent themselves from going insane afterwards. Whatever effect this may have had, one suspects that the money paid out for services rendered helped even more – the killers live and die in comfort, having taken their reward in this world rather than gambling on the next. Running through Oppenheimer's second film about the communist purge – both more intimate and more philosophical than its predecessor – is an acute awareness of the universal purge that ends all life on earth, that final enforcer of equality between victim and killer. **S**

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Co-director

Anonymous

##### Produced by

Signe Byrge

Sørensen

##### Director of

Photography

Lars Skree

##### Editor

Niels Pagh Andersen

##### Sound Editing

and Mix

Henrik Garnov

##### ©Final Cut for Real

ApS, Anonymous,

Piraya Film AS and

Making Movies Oy

##### Production

Companies

Drafthouse

Films, Participant

Media present in

association with

Danish Film Institute,

Bertha Foundation/

BRITDOC, ZDF, Arte a

##### Final Cut for Real film

A film by Joshua

Oppenheimer

Developed with

the support of

the Danish Film

Institute, DANIDA

Produced with

the support of

Danish Film

Institute, Nordisk

Film & TV Fond,

DANIDA, Bertha

BRITDOC, Finnish

Film Foundation,

The Freedom

of Expression

Foundation,

Sundance Institute

Documentary Film

Program, Centre

for Research and

Education in Arts and

Media – University

of Westminster, Arts

and Humanities

Research Council

##### Produced in

collaboration with

ZDF in collaboration

with Arte, DR K, NRK,

YLE, VPRO, Vision

Machine Film Project

Co-produced

by Anonymous,

Making Movies

Oy, Piraya Film

In association with

Spring Films Ltd

##### Executive

Producers

Werner Herzog

Errol Morris

André Singer

##### In Colour

[1.85:1]

##### Subtitles

##### Distributor

Dogwoof

Medan, North Sumatra. Adi, a door-to-door ophthalmologist, lives with his two young children and cares for his aged parents. Adi's father is senile, and his mother is haunted by the memory of the death of one of her sons, Ramli, killed during Indonesia's anti-communist purge of 1965-66, shortly before Adi was born. With the assistance of filmmaker Joshua Oppenheimer, Adi pays house calls to various local figures who were involved in the purge: Inong, a death-squad leader directly responsible for Ramli's murder; a community leader who signed death warrants and became very wealthy through his connivance; his uncle, who was a guard at the prison where Ramli was held; and the family of the second killer involved in the murder of Ramli, Amir Hasan, since deceased. Between interviews, we see Adi watching material that Oppenheimer shot earlier with the killers. They candidly confess their actions to Oppenheimer, though when talking to Adi they deny all knowledge and culpability, and even make veiled threats. A man who was a prisoner alongside Ramli visits Adi's mother. Adi tearfully watches the end of Oppenheimer's interview with Inong and Hasan, who pose for the camera.



Unspeakable acts: Adi interviews former death-squad leaders, including Inong above



## Accidental Love

USA 2013  
Director: Stephen Greene  
Certificate 15 100m 34s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Intended as a screwball political satire in the vein of 2004's *I Heart Huckabees*, what remains of David O. Russell's *Nailed* – presented here as *Accidental Love* and credited to an Alan Smith-style 'Stephen Greene' – now floats somewhere between a bad John Waters film and a neutered Farrelly brothers comedy.

Adapted from the tepidly reviewed novel *Sammy's Hill* by its author Kristin Gore (one of Al Gore's daughters), the film has its own awkward, tense humour but fails to cross over from the predictable to something truly subversive. A nail lodged in the head of heroine Alice causes temporary nymphomania. Jake Gyllenhaal, his eyes bulging like a Panic Pete toy, is the congressman who falls for her; the token black guy (*SNL* alum Tracy Morgan) pairs up with a sassy black woman who has an almost identical name.

Though there are some chuckle-inducing moments, such as when a veterinarian, played by Kirstie Alley, attempts at-home surgery, most of the damage is caused by bizarre editing and camerawork. This is arguably because shooting began in 2008 and was shut down at least eight times because of lack of funds; Russell abandoned the project in 2010. What exists here isn't a facsimile but a Frankenfilm. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Directed by</b> Stephen Greene [i.e. David O. Russell]	<b>Jeffrey Bloomer</b> <b>Costume Designer</b> Marie Sylvie Deveau	<b>Jake Gyllenhaal</b> Howard Birdwell <b>Catherine Keener</b> Representative Pam Hendrickson <b>James Marsden</b> Scott <b>Tracy Morgan</b> Keyshawn <b>Paul Reubens</b> Edwin <b>Beverly D'Angelo</b> Helen Eckle <b>Kurt Fuller</b> Reverend Norm <b>Malinda Williams</b> Rakeesha <b>Kirstie Alley</b> Aunt Rita <b>James Brolin</b> Speaker Buck McCoy
<b>Produced by</b> David R. Bergstein Frederick R. Ulrich Matthew Rhodes Judd Payne Kia Jam <b>Screen Story/</b> <b>Screen Play</b> Kristin Gore Matt Silverstein Dave Jeser Based on the novel <i>Sammy's Hill</i> by Kristin Gore <b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> Max Malkin <b>Editors</b> Robert K. Lambert Mark Bourgeois <b>Production</b> <b>Designer</b> Judy Becker <b>Music</b> John Swihart <b>Production</b> <b>Sound Mixer</b>	<b>©Nailed</b> Partners, LLC <b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> K. Jam Media presents a Kia Jam/Persistent production in association with Lost Fifties Films <b>Executive</b> <b>Producers</b> Sam Solakyan Eugene Scher Julius R. Nassos James W. Skotchdopole <b>Film Extracts</b> <i>Night of the Living</i> <i>Dead</i> (1968) <b>Cast</b> <b>Jessica Biel</b> Alice Eckle	<b>Dolby Digital/</b> <b>Datasat</b> <b>In Colour</b> <b>[1.85:1]</b> <b>Part-subtitled</b> <b>Distributor</b> Arrow Films

A small Indiana town, the recent past. Waitress Alice Eckle is shot in the head with a nail gun just as her boyfriend Scott is proposing to her. She can't afford surgery to remove the nail and has no healthcare. As a result of the injury, she suffers mood swings and her behaviour becomes unpredictable. Scott breaks up with her. Alice befriends two other victims of freak accidents. They travel to Washington DC to plead with congressman Howard Birdwell for better healthcare for people with unusual injuries. Howard falls for Alice, but her plight takes attention away from the house whip's military moon-base project. Fearing retribution, Howard runs away. The whip organises a smear campaign against Alice. Scott brings Howard back to Washington. Howard and Alice reconcile. A healthcare bill covering bizarre injuries such as Alice's is passed into law.

## The Age of Adaline

USA 2015  
Director: Lee Toland Krieger  
Certificate 12A 112m 35s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Saddled with a preposterous premise, director Lee Toland Krieger gives a consistently cool, elegant feel to this lacklustre romantic fantasy about the drawbacks of immortality. Its foot-dragging plot pace and a quasi-authorial voiceover covering Adaline's early life and freak anti-ageing car accident suggest that we've as much time to dawdle as she does. An old-fashioned women's picture that forgoes Old Hollywood virtues such as brevity, wit or emotional heft, it concentrates glassily on poised star Blake Lively's Veronica Lake looks and affect, and her noughties-channels-the-40s wardrobe.

However, the film's preference for glamour and measured calm undermines Adaline's reluctant romance with Michiel Huisman's sensitive internet millionaire Ellis, until it looks as stylised as a perfume commercial. Compared with the fierce albeit melodramatic longing expressed in *The Time Traveller's Wife* (2009) or the mournful *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), this love-across-the-divide seems a limp affair. Harrison Ford raises the temperature as Ellis's father who is also Adaline's long-ago love, his brief performance prickly with grief and incomprehension.

Stylish and stoical to the last, the film deals only briefly with immortality's real downside, in touching scenes where an unwithered Adaline affectionately nags the octogenarian daughter (a warm Ellen Burstyn) whom she most dreads losing. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Sidney Kimmel Tom Rosenberg Gary Lucchesi <b>Screenplay/Story</b> J. Mills Goodloe Salvador Paskowitz <b>Director of</b> <b>Photography</b> David Lanzenberg <b>Editor</b> Melissa Kent <b>Production</b> <b>Designer</b> Claude Paré <b>Music</b> Rob Simonsen <b>Sound Mixer</b> Mark Noda <b>Costume Designer</b> Angus Strathie	Lakeshore Entertainment present a Sidney Kimmel Entertainment, Lakeshore Entertainment, Lionsgate production <b>Executive</b> <b>Producers</b> Andre Lamal Eric Reid David Kern Richard Wright Jim Tauber Bruce Toll Steve Golin Alix Madigan	<b>Dolby Digital/</b> <b>Datasat</b> <b>In Colour</b> <b>[2.35:1]</b> <b>Distributor</b> Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd
<b>©Lakeshore</b> Entertainment Group LLC, Kimmel Distribution LLC and Lions Gate Films Inc. <b>Production</b> <b>Companies</b> Lionsgate, Sidney Kimmel Entertainment,	<b>Cast</b> <b>Blake Lively</b> Adaline Bowman <b>Michiel Huisman</b> Ellis Jones <b>Kathy Baker</b> Kathy Jones <b>Harrison Ford</b> William Jones <b>Ellen Burstyn</b> Flemming	

US, 1937. A lightning strike during a car accident arrests Adaline Bowman's ageing, leaving her always 29. After decades alone in a succession of new identities, she falls in love with Ellis in 2002, a young philanthropist. Meeting his family, she discovers that his father William is her lost love from the 1970s. She poses as her own daughter. When William guesses her secret, she runs away. Another car accident stops her heart but Ellis and paramedics save her. Adaline settles down with Ellis, discovering that the second accident has restarted the ageing process.

## All American High

USA 2014  
Director: Keva Rosenfeld

### Reviewed by Catherine McGahan

Around the time that John Hughes was carving his reputation as the doyen of the 1980s American high-school movie with his two Chicago-based hits *The Breakfast Club* (1985) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), 2,000 miles away in the sun-drenched South Bay region of Los Angeles, a different brand of coming-of-age teen movie was under way. Filmmaker Keva Rosenfeld, whose career has mainly spanned TV shows and advertising, spent the best part of the 1983-84 academic year patrolling the corridors and classrooms of Torrance High School armed with an Arriflex 16mm camera and a loose shooting schedule. The resulting 59-minute documentary, *All American High* (1987), which chronicled a year in the life of the school, enjoyed a fleeting arthouse release and PBS broadcast before being consigned to a storage facility where it languished for nearly three decades.

In 2013 Rosenfeld rediscovered his original and was inspired to remaster it as a feature-length documentary in time for the film's 30th anniversary. For the updated version, *All American High* (2014), he laboriously traced as many of the key protagonists as he could and recorded their reactions to seeing their teen selves in this rollicking 80s time capsule. The newly shot footage forms the second part of the film and is marred by desultory editing, camera-shake and half-hearted framing, which distracts from the content.

The first part of the film (the original 1980s footage) is told from the point of view of Finnish foreign-exchange student Rikki Rauhala, whose natural state seems to be incredulity at the antics of the punkers, meddlers and preppies who populate her temporary world. "In Finland they would never have pinball machines or videogames in school," she muses. The diary form helps cohere what might otherwise amount to a set of disparate vignettes of campus life that don't have the standalone stature of, for instance, the non-narrated tableaux of Frederick Wiseman's *High School* (1968). What's refreshing about the original footage is the openness and naivety of the exuberant teenagers as they go about their daily lives, which might entail surfing, dissecting a frog or hanging at the vast shopping mall. The relaxed 'SoCal' attitude is beautifully encapsulated by the surf-fanatic sports tutor, who, not surprisingly, loves his job: "If someone doesn't answer, that means they've drowned." Social-media-savvy teens and teachers would of course be a lot more wary of a roving camera today and regrettably such candour might well be self-policed.

The bright European ingénue struggling to reconcile the orderly Finnish educational system from which she hails with the unruliness of the American high system provides a tender coming-of-age thread, echoing the film's blockbuster counterparts. Rikki shares to camera her surprise that Californian boys get up early to blow-dry their hair; teachers are addressed by their first name and two-sentence essays are acceptable. "You don't have to study so much, you can have more fun in school," she surmises.

Californian high school in the 80s, as drawn here, is tantamount to a holiday camp, devoid of the engineered conflict – bullying and



# Avengers Age of Ultron

USA 2015

Director: Joss Whedon

Certificate 12A 141m 6s

## Reviewed by Kim Newman

The downside of Marvel's ongoing cinematic universe is that the Avengers films, which bring together players from several individual series, have to spend so much time juggling elements thrown in the air by other movies and setting up plot threads planned for the next clutch of sequels that their actual stories get squeezed thin. Joss Whedon's second grab-all platter of Marvelmania works hard to find something for all the regulars to do while bringing in significant new players – notably the Scarlet Witch and the 'synthetoid' Vision, whose up-and-down comics relationship (their marriage cued the *Daily Bugle* headline "Witch Weds Widge") is signified by a single reaction shot of glowing-eyed Elizabeth Olsen after a scarlet-faced Paul Bettany makes an entrance – and finding moments of quiet emotion amid super-battles and fan-pleasing confrontations.

Some set pieces, such as the incredibly destructive yet bloodless clash between a fully enraged Hulk and Iron Man in specially designed 'Hulkbuster' armour in downtown Johannesburg, are oddly beside the point. What distinguishes the Avengers saga, all the way back to the first Stan Lee and Jack Kirby issues, is the soap-operatic free-for-all between supervillain schemes (even Ultron, an artificial intelligence, sneers at the idea of explaining "my evil plan" to a hero) and kinetic fights. Here, we get a developing relationship between Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow and Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner – which doesn't have a precedent in the comics – predicated on her admission that Russian spy training (which includes being sterilised) has turned her into as much of a monster as his big green



Captain courageous: Chris Evans

alter ego. By contrast, a folksy reveal shows that Jeremy Renner's Hawkeye – who was the Black Widow's original love interest – secretly has a happy home and family outside of avenging duties (though Whedon married off Hawkeye's comic-book wife to someone else on the *Agents of SHIELD* TV series, so Linda Cardellini is a new, token helpmeet here.)



High school whimsical: *All American High*

bitching – associated with the high-school genre in cinema. But lest we forget, this is Reagan-era America, where instant gratification and opportunistic gain reign, and if you're going to have a love-in, you might as well make a killing while you're at it: "You have people and you have beer, that's all you need, that's instant party," says John, who reaps big profits from throwing gatherings at his parents' exclusive home when they're out of town – and his peers are happy to pay for the privilege. ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Keva Rosenfeld  
Linda Mason

### Camera

Kevin O'Brien  
Robert Wise  
Rick Robertson  
Steve Ramsey

### Sound

Yuri Racine  
John Kauffer  
Terry-Dunn Muerer  
Andy Rovins  
Bob Eber  
Bob Shuck  
Jay Gillman

### ©All American

High, LLC

### Production Companies

A Keva Rosenfeld film  
A.G. Images production  
Received a production grant from The American Film Institute in association with The National Endowment of the Arts

### In Colour

[1.78:1]

### Part-subtitled

**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope Entertainment

UK publicity title

**All American**  
**High Revisited**

A follow-up to the 1987 documentary 'All American High', which was filmed at Torrance High School in an upmarket suburb of Los Angeles.

Finnish foreign-exchange student Rikki Rauhala is spending the 1983-84 academic year at the school. Most of the students are loud and exhibitionist, and Rikki, who is studious and reserved, finds it difficult to fit in. She is bemused by the lack of discipline on the part of the teachers and can't believe that surfing, playing pinball and car maintenance are part of the curriculum. She navigates her way through the school cliques, eventually associating herself with the conscientious preppy set. When she becomes best friends with popular cheerleader Lisa, she starts to feel part of the school community. After graduating with good grades, she returns home to Finland.

Thirty years later, Rikki and other Torrance alumni watch the original film and reminisce about their high-school days and describe how their lives have worked out since.

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Kevin Feige  
**Written by**  
Joss Whedon

Based on the Marvel comics by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby

### Director of Photography

Ben Davis

### Edited by

Jeffrey Ford

Lisa Lassek

### Production Design

Charles Wood

### Music

Brian Tyler

Danny Elfman

### Supervising Sound Editors

Frank Eulner

Christopher Boyes

### Costume Designer

Alexandra Byrne

### Visual Effects and Animation

©Marvel

### Industrial Light & Magic

### Visual Effects

Double Negative

Trixter

Method Studios

Iola VFX

Animal Logic VFX

Framestore

Cantina Creative

Soho VFX

Luma Pictures

RISE|Visual

Effects Studios

Zoic Studios

Blur Studio

The Secret Lab

Black Ginger

capital T

Crafty Apes

Technicolor VFX

### Stunt Co-ordinator

Greg Powell

©Marvel

### Production Companies

Marvel Studios

presents a Joss Whedon film

Filmed with the participation of the KOFIC Location Incentive

Produced with the assistance of the Department of Trade and Industry

South Africa and the Italian tax credit provided for by Law n. 244 (12/2007)

### Executive Producers

Louis D'Esposito

Alan Fine

Victoria Alonso

Jeremy Latcham

Patricia Whitcher

Jon Favreau

Stan Lee

### Cast

**Robert Downey Jr**

Tony Stark, Iron Man

**Chris Hemsworth**

Thor

**Mark Ruffalo**

Bruce Banner, 'Hulk'

**Chris Evans**

Steve Rogers, 'Captain America'

**Scarlett Johansson**

Natasha Romanoff, 'Black Widow'

**Jeremy Renner**

Clint Barton, 'Hawkeye'

**Don Cheadle**

James Rhodes, 'War Machine'

**Aaron Taylor-Johnson**

Pietro Maximoff, 'Quicksilver'

**Elizabeth Olsen**

Wanda Maximoff,

### 'Scarlet Witch'

**Paul Bettany**

Jarvis/Vision

**Cobie Smulders**

Maria Hill

**Anthony Mackie**

Sam Wilson, 'The Falcon'

**Hayley Atwell**

Peggy Carter

**Idris Elba**

Heimdall

**Linda Cardellini**

Laura Barton

**Stellan Skarsgård**

Erik Selvig

**Claudia Kim**

Dr Helen Cho

**Thomas Kretschmann**

Baron von Strucker

**James Spader**

Ultron

**Samuel L. Jackson**

Nick Fury

### Dolby Digital/ Dolby Atmos

**In Colour**

**Prints by**

FotoKem

[2.35:1]

### Some screenings presented in 3D

### Distributor

Buena Vista International (UK)

The Avengers – Tony Stark (Iron Man), Steve Rogers (Captain America), Thor, Natasha Romanoff (Black Widow), Clint Barton (Hawkeye) and Bruce Banner (sometimes the Hulk) – clash with Baron von Strucker, a villain who has stolen the mystic staff of Loki, and run into twins Pietro and Wanda Maximoff, whom von Strucker has endowed with superpowers. Stark and Banner, worried about future threats, create Ultron, an artificial intelligence which turns against them and recruits Pietro and Wanda to destroy the team. Wanda uses her mind-control powers to influence the individual Avengers to rampage or envision terrifying fates, but learns that Ultron intends to

wipe out humanity by levitating an Eastern European city and hurling it at Earth like a meteor. Using a gemstone from Loki's staff and the remnant of Jarvis, another artificial intelligence, Stark creates the Vision, a synthetic life-form who sides with the Avengers. In battle, Wanda and Pietro change sides; Pietro is killed saving Hawkeye. The Avengers fight various manifestations of Ultron, save the population of the floating city and avert disaster. Ultron is destroyed. Thor, Iron Man and Banner depart on their own business. Captain America and Black Widow recruit Wanda, James Rhodes (War Machine) and Sam Wilson (the Falcon) as replacements.



These get-togethers feel like comic-book annuals or crossover events, with more characters than can comfortably be accommodated, as well as big scraps that keep everyone in motion, although the three major solo heroes are on pause in their character arcs. Before yet another climax in which something vast and heavy (here, a whole city) threatens to crash catastrophically on to Earth (or Xandar, in *Guardians of the Galaxy*), Robert Downey Jr's Tony Stark muses "no way we all get through this" – a line excerpted in the trailer, with the same effect as the comic cover promising, "This issue, one of these Avengers will DIE." Given the mix of the epic and the petty that characterises Marvel Studios' handling of its properties, it's no surprise that the eventual casualty is doomed as much by a rights quirk as by the needs of dramatic storytelling.

In coming up with a new backstory for the Maximoff twins Pietro (Quicksilver) and Wanda (Scarlet Witch) – who were, until a recent rethink, the children of X-Men adversary Magneto, hence Quicksilver's alternate appearance in Fox's rival franchise entry *X-Men Days of Future Past* (2014) – Whedon makes them survivors of the damage wrought in their homeland Sokovia by weapons manufactured by Tony Stark in his pre-heroic warmongering career. Aaron Taylor-Johnson's wry speedster Pietro compares well with Evan Peters's slacker version in the *X-Men* film, indulging in a nice mini-feud with Hawkeye, but Whedon isn't as imaginative a director of scenes involving superpowers as Bryan Singer, and nothing here is as strong as the 'Time in a Bottle' set piece of *Days of Future Past*. However, when it reaches its extended climax, *Age of Ultron* perfectly delivers huge action scenes with the requisite smaller heroic beats. In pointed, deliberate contrast to Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* (2013), much of the finale is concerned with protecting and evacuating civilians from the danger zone before the heavy hitters take on the multiple-bodied, James Spader-voiced robot baddie.

For all the cosmic scale – we get more of Thanos, Marvel's dullest galactic menace, in the end-credits teaser – Whedon remains happiest with smaller-scale, TV-style snappy patter (Downey Jr talking to himself remains a delight), fanfic-like indulgence of long-established characters (Captain America's fantasy of a 1945 victory dance he never got to attend) and bottom-of-the-panel awesome moments (Black Widow scooping up Captain America's shield, the Vision casually proving himself morally beyond reproach by lifting Thor's hammer, Scarlet Witch propelled by grief into huge-scale hexing). The strength of the Marvel Movie Method overall entails a weakness of individual films, which can't afford to be too daring (as the original, departed directors of *Thor: The Dark World* or *Ant-Man* found) or resolve anything (even deaths are provisional), because the saga continues.

Forthcoming films offer subtitles such as 'Civil War', 'Ragnarok' and 'Infinity' to convey the scale of what is intended. In the scheme of things, a mere *Age of Ultron* simply passes by, a loud prologue for never-ending adventures yet to be told. In his mandatory cameo, Stan Lee perhaps says it best: "Excelsior!" ☞

## Blood Cells

United Kingdom/Italy/Kazakhstan/Republic of Korea/USA 2014, Directors: Joseph Bull, Luke Seomore  
Certificate 15 85m 51s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's somewhat mild praise when one emerges from a film admiring the cinematography but feeling lukewarm at best about pretty much everything else. As his work on Duane Hopkins's recent *Bypass* underlined, cameraman David Procter can bring a desolate beauty to the scrag end of Britain, capturing milky light filtering through grimy windows and evocative urban nightscapes. But if one marvels throughout *Blood Cells* at his striking visual collaboration with writer-directors Joseph Bull and Luke Seomore, it is in part because the uninvolved storyline doesn't fire the imagination.

Hopkins co-produced this for Newcastle-based production company Third Films, but while he ensured that *Bypass* packed its story of everyday hardship with sundry dramatic run-ins, here the first-time creative team prove confrontation-averse as Barry Ward's despairing alcoholic protagonist visits old haunts and old friends across the country yet shies away from healing the family rift that has set him on his way. Parcelling out the story's key flashback so that the truth is revealed in instalments feels like an over-convenient bit of audience manipulation, but otherwise, much as we might admire the ever-poised images, craggy Ward's tiresomely self-destructive and evasive antihero gives us scant reason to keep watching. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Samm Haillay  
Ben Young  
Duane Hopkins  
**Written by**  
Joseph Bull  
Luke Seomore  
Ben Young  
**Director of Photography**  
David Procter  
**Editor**  
Darren Baldwin  
**Production Design**  
Ben Lack  
Samuel Waters  
**Composer**  
Luke Seomore  
**Sound Design**  
Patch Rowland  
Luke Seomore  
**Costume Design**  
Joseph Crone

©Blood Cells Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
La Biennale di Venezia – Biennale College Cinema in partnership with Gucci, Third with the support of Ministero

dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo Direzione Generale Cinema, Regione del Veneto, Eurasia in collaboration with Busan International Film Festival, IFF, TorinoFilmLab  
A film by Joseph Bull & Luke Seomore  
Early project development support provided by CPH:FORUM

**Cast**  
Barry Ward  
Adam  
Hayley Squires  
Hayley  
Jimmy Akingbola  
Debo  
Silas Carson  
Tariq  
Keith McErlean  
Keith  
Chloe Pirrie  
Lauren  
Francis Magee  
Cormac

**Northern England. Dairy farmer Cormac faces ruin after losing his herd to bovine disease. Years later, his son Adam receives a call from his estranged brother Aiden, who is about to become a father himself and is eager to have his older sibling present. Aiden, in the grip of a drink problem, visits past haunts and old friends across the country, including ex-girlfriend Lauren (now somewhat distant), cousin Keith (keenly disapproving) and more recent lover Hayley (whose sex work dismays him), all the while recalling how he found his father dying of a self-inflicted shotgun wound. Visiting the hospital to see Aiden with his new child suggests a brighter future for the shattered family.**

## Bombay Velvet

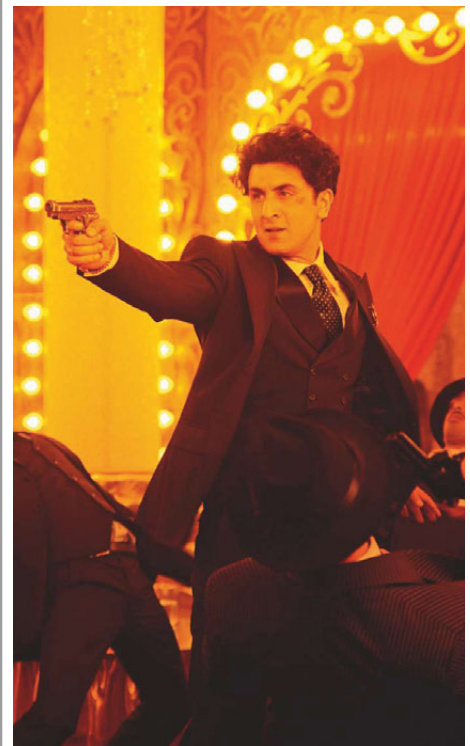
Director: Anurag Kashyap  
Certificate 15 148m 53s

### Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Anurag Kashyap likes his crime. Whether writing the seminal gangster film *Satya* (1998) or directing movies such as *Paanch* (2003), *Black Friday* (2004), *Gangs of Wasseyapur* (2012) and *Ugly* (2013), he has explored many facets of the criminal universe, and even in those of his films that are ostensibly about something else, the criminal underbelly lurks just beneath the surface. Now he returns to his favourite genre with the big-budget extravaganza *Bombay Velvet*. The stakes are much higher this time around: the prize at the centre of the film is the city of Bombay itself.

The story takes place in the 1960s, as Bombay is becoming a metropolis and vast tracts of land reclaimed from the sea are up for grabs. The two main antagonists, editor-owners of rival tabloid newspapers, have their eyes on the prize along with the great and the good of the city. At the centre of this land-grab tale are a petty crook turned nightclub manager and a jazz singer, both plying their trade at the Bombay Velvet club/speakeasy. Their romance, while larger events swirl around them, is at once playful, tender and violent, and is the beating heart of the film. They are the archetypal damaged people who find solace in each other. The world they inhabit is spectacular – the production design is a grand recreation of the Bombay of that time, and visually the film boasts some of the most stunning imagery ever seen in Indian cinema. And all of it is set to a soaring score influenced by the Portuguese Goan music of the period.

Kashyap's visual template here is Hollywood, particularly Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972), Francis Ford Coppola's *The Cotton Club* (1984) and Martin Scorsese's *New York, New York* (1977), and these styles are blended with Bombay's art deco structures to create a ravishing universe, frequently punctuated with bursts of Tommy-



Join the club: Ranbir Kapoor



## Les Combattants

France 2014  
Director: Thomas Cailley  
Certificate 15 98m 28s

See interview  
on page 10

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Thomas Cailley's first feature was the toast of last year's Cannes festival, winning several awards at the Directors' Fortnight. This critical accolade continued with a uniformly enthusiastic reception in the French press and three Césars at the 2015 ceremony, for Best First Film and each of the two lead actors. Difficult, after all the acclaim, not to be disappointed by this engaging, quirky but slight film, despite two central performances that are indeed brilliant.

*Les Combattants* is certainly an unusual take on the romantic comedy, which is one of the generic labels that has been attached to it: Arnaud (Kévin Azaïs) is a shy, insecure young man working with his brother Manu (Antoine Laurent) in the family carpentry business after the premature death of their father. With their mother (played by filmmaker Brigitte Roüan), they form a close-knit family. Their plans are upset, however, when Arnaud falls for the apparently tough, confident and initially hostile Madeleine (Adèle Haenel), who is planning to join the army to learn survival skills in preparation for what she fears is approaching Armageddon. What then unfolds is a romcom-type narrative in the sense that Arnaud and Madeleine get together (he joins her at the army camp), fight, separate, meet again, make love, live in the forest and almost die in a fire, finally planning some kind of hopeful if vague future. *Les Combattants* is also a recognisable young French auteur film (Cailley is a graduate of the Femis), with its well-made low-key quotidian scenes, minimally sketched out social background, mysterious imagery (recurrent, odd, animalistic images) and ambiguous ending.

While the film was deemed at Cannes to bring a breath of fresh air to French comedy, to what extent it is a comedy at all is debatable. That partly depends on whether you find jokes about coffins or producing frozen dead chicks as pet food funny. In



Branching out: Adèle Haenel, Kévin Azaïs

this respect the film fits within fashionable *décalé* (oddball) humour in French media; conversely the scenes at the army camp mock the officers as de facto idiots in very conventional ways. Equally conventionally, while the no-nonsense Madeleine initially shows herself tougher than the timid Arnaud, a brave young woman who has no truck with makeup or pretty frocks, the final coming-of-age narrative is his: he toughens up under army discipline, while she becomes increasingly 'a girl'; she then gets bored with living in the wild and is violently sick after eating roast fox, before being rescued, damsel-in-distress style, by Arnaud, who saves her life by carrying her limp body for hours.

Nevertheless, *Les Combattants* is not without charm. Its location on the south-west coast in a modest family avoids the clichés of either 'miserabilist' banlieue films or the usual affluent Parisian milieu of French auteur cinema. And there are the wonderful central performances. While Azaïs is excellent, Haenel confirms her promise from previous roles in Céline Sciamma's *Water Lilies* (2007) and Katell Quillévéré's *Suzanne* (2013). One can look forward to seeing her in a spate of forthcoming films, including the next work by the Dardenne brothers. That she manages to render the implausible Madeleine moving, and almost credible, is a credit to her talent. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> Anurag Kashyap Vikramaditya Motwane Vikas Bahl Madhu Mantena	<b>Companies</b> Fox Star Studios, Phantom Productions <b>Executive Producer</b> Ranbir Kapoor	<b>Subtitles</b>  <b>Distributor</b> 20th Century Fox International (UK)
<b>Written by</b> Anurag Kashyap S. Thanikachalam Vasan Bala Based on the book <i>Mumbai Fables</i> by Gyan Prakash	<b>Cast</b> <b>Ranbir Kapoor</b> Johnny Balaraj <b>Anushka Sharma</b> Rosie Noronha <b>Manish Choudhary</b> Jimmy Mistry	
<b>Cinematography</b> Rajeev Ravi	<b>Kay Kay Menon</b> Investigative Kulkarni	
<b>Editor</b> Thelma Schoonmaker Prerna Saigal	<b>Karan Johar</b> Kaizad Khambatta	
<b>Production Designer</b> Sonal Sawant	<b>Siddhartha Basu</b> Romi Patel	
<b>Lyricist</b> Amitabh Bhattacharya	<b>Remo Fernandes</b> Portuguese man	
<b>Sound</b> Kunal Sharma	<b>Satyadeep Mishra</b> Chimman	
<b>Costume Designer</b> Niharika Bhasin Khan	<b>Vivaan Shah</b> Tony <b>Mukesh Chhabra</b>	
<b>Production</b>	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1]	

**Bombay, 1949.** Orphans Balraj and Chimman grow up in a brothel. Meanwhile in Portuguese Goa the musically gifted Rosie suffers abuse from her mentor.

The 1960s. Balraj and Chimman are now small-time crooks. Kaizad Khambatta, who owns the tabloid 'Torrent', takes them under his wing, renaming Balraj Johnny; he employs them to do his dirty work, eliminating his rivals and taking incriminating pictures of an honest government minister who has the power to allot land in the ongoing reclamation of the city's Back Bay area. As a reward, Johnny is made manager of Khambatta's new nightclub Bombay Velvet, with Chimman as his deputy. Rosie escapes from Goa and moves to Bombay, where Khambatta's rival Jimmy Mistry, who runs the tabloid 'Glitz', befriends her. Mistry sends Rosie to be a singer at Bombay Velvet so that she can get close to Johnny and retrieve the negatives of the minister's photos, which are in his possession. Rosie and Johnny fall in love.

After a series of betrayals during which the club is attacked and forced to close, there is an attempt on Rosie's life. Johnny fakes her death and she poses as her twin sister Rita. Chimman dies and Johnny goes on the run. Khambatta kidnaps Rosie. Johnny rescues her but is shot dead.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Pierre Guyard <b>Written by</b> Thomas Cailley Claude Le Pape <b>Director of Photography</b> David Cailley <b>Editor</b> Lilian Corbeille <b>Art Director</b> Paul Chapelle <b>Original Music</b> Lionel Flairs Benoit Rault Philippe Deshaies <b>Sound</b> Jean-Luc Audy Rémi Boucheteau Antoine Baudouin Niels Barletta <b>Costume Designer</b> Ariane Daurat	of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions, Haut et Court Distribution with the support of Centre National de la Cinématographie et de l'Image Animée, Région Aquitaine and the Département des Pyrénées-Atlantiques in association with Cofimage 25, Palatine Étoile 11 in co-production with Appaloosa Distribution	<b>[1.85:1]</b> <b>Subtitles</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Curzon Film World
<b>Cast</b> <b>Adèle Haenel</b> Madeleine Beaulieu <b>Kévin Azaïs</b> Arnaud Labrède <b>Antoine Laurent</b> Manu Labrède <b>Brigitte Roüan</b> Hélène Labrède	<b>Dolby Digital</b> <b>In Colour</b>	
©Nord-Ouest Films - Appaloosa Distribution <b>Production Companies</b> Nord-Ouest presents with the participation		

The south-west coast of France, present day. Following the death of their father, Arnaud and his brother Manu decide to keep his carpentry business going and stay in the family house with their mother. Arnaud meets Madeleine, a young woman training to join the army. Driven by fears of an approaching apocalypse, she believes the army will teach her the survival techniques necessary to confront the end of the world. Although they fight when they first meet, Arnaud is smitten. As a result, he joins her at the army training camp, antagonising his brother, who resents his desertion. At the camp, Arnaud does increasingly well but Madeleine becomes disillusioned with the tenor of the officers' instruction. She and Arnaud clash again. However, when he leaves the camp one night, angry at her rejection, she follows him and they decide to survive in the forest on their own resources. They make love and experience a brief idyllic period, fishing and hunting for food. But when Madeleine becomes sick, Arnaud carries her out of the forest. They reach a seemingly abandoned village, where Arnaud tries to find help. Subsequently engulfed in billowing black smoke from a forest fire, they are rescued, unconscious, and taken to hospital. After reconciling with his brother, Arnaud meets Madeleine again and they promise each other they will be better prepared next time.



## Comet

USA 2014  
Director: Sam Esmail

### Reviewed by Sue Harris

"It's not a dream," announces Dell as he paces anxiously outside a mysterious closed door. Suddenly the screen flickers and flashes, like an old television on the blink. Dell is transported to another place and time, where he is young and cocksure, and about to be hit by a car. His life is saved by Kimberly, and this serendipitous event sets the direction of their life to come: we see the mature couple in a Paris hotel, angry and mistrustful of each other at someone else's wedding; a more youthful, student version reconcile on a train journey 'north'; in a long-distance phone call between New York and Los Angeles, betrayal and jealousy mark the end of the road for their independent careerist selves. And finally, there they are in the room behind the closed door, and the building itself trembles as separation becomes inevitable.

Whether this is a dream, a set of memories, what actually happened or a meditation on what might have been remains unresolved. The texture of the film is compelling, and a final scene of the couple pondering their romantic journey beneath two simultaneously rising suns is typically quirky. The sense of a world off-kilter, a dislocated universe in which all balance and stability has been lost, works well enough as a metaphor for doomed passion. But oh those endless, combative, unfunny, narcissistic conversations! ☹



California dreaming: Justin Long, Emmy Rossum

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Chad Hamilton  
Lee Clay  
**Written by**  
Sam Esmail  
**Director of Photography**  
Eric Koretz  
Editor  
Franklin Peterson  
**Production Designer**  
Annie Spitz  
**Music**  
**Composed by**  
Daniel Hart  
**Sound Mixer**  
Dennis Grzesik  
Chris Howland

**Costume Designer**  
Mona May  
**@Comet Movie, LLC**  
**Production Companies**  
A Fubar Films  
production in association with  
Anonymous Content  
A film by Sam Esmail  
**Executive Producers**  
Steve Golin  
Emmy Rossum  
Justin Long  
Colin Bates  
Peter M. DeGeorge  
William A. Stetson

**Cast**  
Justin Long  
Dell  
Emmy Rossum  
Kimberly  
Kayla Servi  
Stephanie  
Eric Winter  
Josh  
**In Colour**  
**Distributor**  
Content Media

Dell and Kimberly meet at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles on the night of a meteor shower. The film then charts the stages of their six-year romance through seemingly random episodes across parallel universes. We witness snippets of their life together as they engage in philosophical conversations about the nature of their love.

## Concrete Clouds

Thailand/Hong Kong/Switzerland/The Netherlands/Republic of Korea 2013  
Director: Lee Chatametikool  
Certificate 15 99m 24s

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

"If our lives were a soap opera, I'd like to skip this episode," croons the trashy chanteuse a few minutes into this Thai family melodrama directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul's editor Lee Chatametikool. Produced by Weerasethakul himself and photographed by *Tropical Malady's* Jarin Pengpanich, this is certainly one for Thai New Cinema completists, though it has far more of a flavour of old-school Thai cinema (or 'Tollywood') than might be expected.

Two female characters dominate *Concrete Clouds*, yet men are superficially to the fore and get more lines. This is one of several puzzles about the film. The dynamics of grief, apparently so central to the film, are only lightly explored when all is said and done. We open in a messy 1990s office in Bangkok, where a man gets up, bows to the pictures of his dead parents and then throws himself into the streets below.

His rather smooth, very westernised Wall Street trader son Mutt (Ananda Everingham) takes the news of his death without much outward show of grief. He's a numb man. The dreadful phone call comes through to his New York apartment, which is complete with white trophy girlfriend Kate on the bed in the background; it's the last time we meet Kate, for as soon as Mutt goes back to the old country to sort out his father's financial affairs and his brother's future, he's back on the trail of the one that got away, a girl from his teenage years called Sai (Janesuda Parnto). Sai is now working in marketing after throwing in an acting career, but she's hiding a secret: her glamorous and successful life is all a sham – she's in serious debt, and the bank is about to repossess her riverside condo.

The film's other female character is Poupee, the younger sister of a prostitute, who is a friend of Mutt's little brother Nic. They don't appear to have a sexual relationship, and she calls him a "mummy's boy". Poupee (*Same Same But Different's* Apinya Sakuljaroensuk) likes mooching on the roof, smoking crack and going through her sister's things and intercepting aggrieved letters from former western clients. In one of the better scenes,



Ananda Everingham, Janesuda Parnto

Nic translates a letter for her, changing the angry and rejected words into ones of sweet sentiment. She's easily the most interesting character in the film, and we never find out enough about her.

Mutt and Sai seem destined to end up in bed, but at the last minute the spell breaks. Sai says she needs to find a rich husband – pretty much immediately. When Mutt tries to protest that he's always been in love with her, she sadly contradicts him: he's only in love with love.

The film is intercut with lo-fi images from period Thai TV, while bubblegum videos from karaoke machines provide local flavour without adding anything to the narrative. Images of consumerism are designed to show empty lives and false hopes. This is a film primed and fashioned with serious technical expertise but not especially well directed, and with a script as thin as glass noodles hanging from a fork. The feeling that it is just a Weerasethakul project to placate a cherished member of his regular crew can never quite be gainsaid, despite the film winning Best Director and Best Film in Thailand's Subhanahongsa Awards earlier this year. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Sylvia Chang  
Kamontorn  
Eakwattanakij  
**Art Director**  
Akekarat Homlaor  
**Sound Design**  
Akritchalerm  
Kalayanamitr  
**Costume Designer**  
Cattleya Paosrijareon  
**Director of Photography**  
Jarin Pengpanich  
**Editors**

Lee Chatametikool  
Kamontorn  
Eakwattanakij  
**Production Companies**  
A Vertical Films  
production in co-production with Far Sun Films, Kick the Machine  
Films in association with Electric Eel Films, Song Sound Productions, Halo Productions  
With the support of Visions Sud Est, Hubert Bals Fund, Asian Cinema Fund  
Additional support by Red Snapper, Hong Kong – Asia Film Financing Forum, White Light  
**Executive Producers**  
Man-shih Yang  
Disaphol Chansiri

**Cast**  
Ananda Everingham  
Mutt  
Apinya Sakuljaroensuk  
Poupee  
Janesuda Parnto  
Sai  
Prawith Hansten  
Nic  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Subtitles**  
**Distributor**  
Day for Night  
Thai theatrical title  
Pavang rak

Thailand, during the financial crisis of 1997. A man jumps to his death from a building. In New York, his son Mutt, a currency trader, receives the news in the middle of the night in the smart apartment he shares with his American girlfriend; soon Mutt is back in Thailand dealing with both the financial and personal repercussions of his father's death. Most prominent among Mutt's concerns is his teenage brother Nic, who is unconvinced by the plan to sell the family house and send him to the US to start a

new life. Nic is hanging out with Poupee, a girl from a neighbouring apartment, who like her sister is sliding into prostitution. Searching through his things in his old bedroom, Mutt reflects on the past and what might have been had he not gone to America. He looks up an old flame, Sai, a former actress who is hiding her dire financial straits behind a glossy job in marketing, and whose apartment is about to be repossessed. Sai dismisses Mutt's protestations of love, telling him that he loves only the idea of love.



## Electric Boogaloo The Wild, Untold Story of Cannon Films

Australia 2014, Director: Mark Hartley, Certificate 18 106m 18s

### Reviewed by James Rocarols

*Not Quite Hollywood* was an earlier film by Mark Hartley, and its title provides a neat summation of the director's professed field of study. With *Electric Boogaloo*, he has now produced a trio of films covering the golden age of exploitation cinema. *Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild, Untold Story of Ozploitation!* tackled the Australian exploitation boom of 1970-90, while *Machete Maidens Unleashed!* looked at the outsourcing of American genre cinema to the Philippines during a similar period. Here the focus is on a single production company, Cannon Films, acquired by Israeli cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus in 1979 and soon developed into the home of unapologetic 80s action cinema.

All three films invite us to marvel at a bygone era of populist plurality, when independent producers could reach enormous audiences by promising the sex and violence that the majors then refrained from. Of course, Hartley also wants us to revel in the insanity (and inanity) of the Cannon back catalogue: one can only admire the demented imagination that produced films such as the demonic possession/martial arts hybrid *Ninja III: The Domination* and Tobe Hooper's naked-space-vampires saga *LifeForce*. But on the issue of the Golan-Globus methods and their contribution to the development of independent cinema, the film retains some ambivalence.


Generally the colourful and candid reflections of former Cannon contributors are good-humoured, but many interviewees denounce the company ethos and belittle the product: one former actress tries to set fire to a DVD with her Cannon credit; another compares Golan to Jabba the Hutt. Frank Yablans, the distinguished Hollywood executive who presided over a shortlived MGM-UA distribution merger in the early 80s, snootily dismisses their entire output as garbage and an embarrassment.

One of the film's themes is that, as foreigners, Golan and Globus never truly understood American culture and could only provide glaringly ersatz facsimiles of Hollywood pictures – just like the Australians and Filipinos of Hartley's earlier examinations.

(Throughout, the constant parodying of the cousins' Israeli accents is borderline distasteful.) For a brief period, however, Cannon did attempt its own route to cultural credibility, supporting filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Franco Zeffirelli, Barbet Schroeder and Godfrey Reggio. Few now would quibble with the quality of Andrei Konchalovsky's *Runaway Train*, while *Love Streams* is arguably John Cassavetes's crowning achievement.

What's undeniable is that the Go-Go boys' business and marketing tactics were A-list. They pioneered the concept of pre-selling productions based on artwork alone, and revolutionised the notion of rush-producing rival titles for upcoming bandwagons. In terms of story arc though, the Golan-Globus script conforms to a well-trodden template of Icarus-like over-ambition. After devising a seemingly successful strategy based around the endless churn of low-budget fare, some of which struck gold, Cannon expanded into ill-advised *Superman* sequels and Sylvester Stallone vehicles that decimated profit margins. Their downfall was eventually hastened by the needless acquisition of European assets such as ABC cinemas and the Pathé News library.

In style, Hartley's film is slick, crisply edited and dynamically scored, rattling through avuncular interviews and kinetic clips with the kind of breathless pace arguably lacking from some of Cannon's lesser actioners. A favourite trick is the intercutting of two interviewees retelling the same zany story. With contributions largely based around the anecdotes of former company employees, what's missing here is the patronage of a genuinely recognisable cheerleader, in contrast to Quentin Tarantino's infectious ramble in *Not Quite Hollywood*. All three of Hartley's documentaries are adept at highlighting lesser-known entries, and more adventurous viewers will be making mental notes to seek out films such as *Joe* and *The Apple*.

But the chief reason to watch is simply to enjoy the ride; younger viewers will likely be amazed that such a crazy catalogue made it into multiplexes, while those from the videotape generation may be alarmed at just how many of these disreputable gems they've already seen. 

## The Emperor's New Clothes


Directors: Russell Brand, Michael Winterbottom  
Certificate 15 96m 53s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The world is an unfair place, no question about it. As Russell Brand says at the very beginning of this feisty and effective collaboration with Michael Winterbottom, "Everything you're going to hear about in this film you already know." To admit this at the outset makes several things clear: first, it attests to Brand's cocky tell-it-like-it-is shtick – because confessing you've got nothing new to say might seem a bit risky to a less eye-wateringly confident man. But second, and more importantly, it sums up the exasperation that will come increasingly to the fore as the film sets up example after example of blatant greed, selfishness and heartlessness among the super-rich. "You already know this," is the subtext of each cheap stunt or thought-provoking interview. "Why are you just sitting there?"

While the fierce tone of Brand's observations is consistent, his illustrative examples seem to include anything and everything that catches his eye. Not that he has far to look for instances of financial injustice: the 2008 banking crisis provides plenty of grist to his mill, along with the Libor and forex scandals, which he doesn't claim fully to understand, though he's pretty sure they involve dishonest bankers. By making a virtue out of mispronouncing scribbled crib sheets on these matters, he manages to underline his point about the labyrinthine complexity of the system without sacrificing his credibility – because he doesn't claim any credibility in the first place. Standing outside the revolving door of one of many banks that have refused him entry, he accosts a passing employee with a cheerful cry of "I don't know what Libor is, can you explain it to me?" Thus skewered, the presumably blameless worker can only look shifty. "It's nothing to do with me," he protests as he edges unhappily past.

As they accumulate, such tricks begin to sit uncomfortably in a film about the abuse of power: when Brand chooses to embarrass the security guards who have to bar his way, it's obvious that the household name with the film crew in tow holds all the aces. There's a staleness to these staged and slightly pointless confrontations, which have already been done, and done better, by the likes of Nick Broomfield and Michael Moore. Brand is on much more convincing form when mingling with the victims of corporate greed – the exhausted, minimum-wage, zero-hours cleaners and shift workers who despair of ever scrabbling their way out of the poverty trap. Here, Brand's high-voltage charisma really does throw light into dark corners, and he is disarming in his refusal to patronise his interviewees. Indeed, he is a better listener than most news reporters, and these sections of the film produce some of its most memorably human moments.

Winterbottom directs proceedings with a light touch – this is Brand's show and he's in most shots, either close up as he proffers winking confidences, or in the distance, striding towards his next victim. The studio-shot pieces to camera which bind his arguments together are overlaid with glitchy graphics and captions that don't add much finesse but contribute to a YouTube-y DIY aesthetic designed presumably to make his online audience (more than a million of them at the last count) feel at home. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Brett Ratner  
James Packer  
Veronica Fury

#### Written by

Mark Hartley

#### Cinematographer

Garry Richards

#### Edited by

Mark Hartley  
Sara Edwards  
Jamie Blanks

#### Music

Jamie Blanks

#### Sound Recordist

Jock Healy

@Wildbear

Entertainment

Pty Ltd, Screen

Queensland Pty

Ltd, Film Victoria

and Filmfest Ltd

#### Production Companies

Ratpac Documentary

Films and Brett

Ratner present

in association

with Wildbear

Entertainment,

Melbourne

International Film  
Festival Premiere  
Fund, Screen  
Queensland, Film  
Victoria, Screen  
Australia and Celluloid  
Nightmares  
A Mark Hartley film  
Produced in  
association with  
Celluloid Dreams  
Financed with  
the assistance  
of Australian  
Government - Screen  
Australia, Film

Victoria Australia  
Co-financed and  
produced with the  
assistance of Screen  
Queensland  
Produced with the  
financial assistance  
of The Melbourne  
International Film  
Festival (MIFF)  
Premiere Fund an  
initiative of the  
State Government  
of Victoria, Australia  
MIFF Premiere Fund  
Executive Producer:

Mark Woods

#### Executive Producers

Nate Bolotin

Todd Brown

Jeff Harrison

Hugh Marks

#### With

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

A documentary about the rise and fall of Cannon Films, the independent production company run by Israeli cousins Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus in the 1980s. Interviews with former collaborators and clips from their productions illustrate the studio's story. After initial success based on a stable of

mass-marketed exploitation films, Cannon expanded into bigger-budget action pictures, largely corralled around their two contract stars, Chuck Norris and Charles Bronson. Following a brief diversion into auteur cinema, the company overreached itself with a roster of expensive sci-fi flops and ill-advised acquisitions.



## 51° North

United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Grigoriy Richters

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Working with limited resources and a lot of enterprise, writer-director Grigoriy Richters ambitiously sets out to tackle the sort of subject matter that is usually the meat of larger-budgeted projects, offering a cut-price end-of-the-world scenario which parallels both the Bruce Willis vehicle *Armageddon* (whose scientific absurdities are joshed) and Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*.

*51° North* (the title refers to the approximate latitude of London) takes the form of a found-footage picture, with video-diary wittering, interviews with real (and bogus) experts, animated asteroid-strike simulations, YouTube clips, home movies (the highest product of a lost civilisation is a cute-puppy video), clueless Twitter-feed scrolling and CCTV or Google Earth on-the-streets material providing a collage of the last days of the planet as seen through the lenses of erratic vlogger Damon Miller.

The protagonist's general hopelessness (he lucks into an interview with Stephen Hawking that could be worth a lot to his struggling company, but gets lost en route to Cambridge and turns up too late to film the savant) carries over from his bumbling onscreen persona to his choice of glad-handing, sex-and-drugs-obsessed chancer Michael as a business partner and every other decision he makes. He can't hold together a relationship with his understanding, under-characterised girlfriend – who is packed off pregnant to the international space station by mysterious forces – let alone retain the attention of the fickle internet audience.

The long lead-up to the inevitable revelation that the asteroid-obsessed paranoid's worst fear is about to come true is repetitive, padded and hard to warm to, but smart points are made about the way that social media, citizen journalism and internet conspiracy theorists have created an information sphere in which it is impossible to put over vital facts without getting lost in the white noise. It's just a shame this film needs to include so much of the said noise.

There's quite a lot of the protagonist in his flat scribbling on the walls and pinning up charts which, Michael correctly points out, make the place look like the lair of a movie serial killer. But the last act gets out on to the London streets for a guerrilla-cinema take on the depopulated, doomed city of Val Guest's *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961). With a flash mob of extras in Piccadilly Circus reacting to the news that the world is doomed, the hero wandering through abandoned and shattered streets *28 Days Later*-style and some quite daring use of snatched locations (Richters claims he was stopped and booked by police 42 times during the production of the movie), *51° North* finally manages some apocalyptic scale, even before the CGI meteors hit.

The film is vague about the shadowy forces that commission Damon to provide this record of Earth's final days, and vaguer still about life in the post-Earth future on the space station where Damon's son Light puts his father's footage together. Light's film opens with 1892 footage that he claims is the first moving image of mankind, and carries over to Damon's material, which is purportedly



Do the right thing: Russell Brand

However, one of the most striking sequences in the film is almost entirely visual, and doesn't involve Brand at all; whether devised by him or by Winterbottom, it has a disproportionate impact. Illustrating the point that vast amounts of global wealth are held by a handful of more or less invisible individuals, two coaches are loaded with actors wearing the smugly grinning masks of the super-rich. By the time they disembark they are, through the magic of cinema, in Africa, and the jolting juxtaposition is allowed to sink in without further comment.

Of course, there's nothing nuanced or sophisticated about such finger-pointing and table-thumping. Brand doesn't offer much in the way of answers, except to hark back to historical precedents such as the New Deal, and to advocate direct action and grassroots protest. Unsophisticated thinking is the point: as the film's title suggests, Brand believes that it takes

a childlike literal-mindedness to cut through the deliberate obfuscation shielding much of the capitalist system from close examination. He has, indeed, a slightly alarming tendency to drape himself with the nearest child at any opportunity, which leads to one off-colour moment when a child squirms in his lap and he quips "Don't do that again till you're 25."

There's no doubt, though, that Brand is absolutely serious and sincere about his mission to shake society out of its stupor. Those who dismiss him as a smug self-publicist with annoying hair miss the point of his popularity. In a culture where, like it or not, entertainers are hyper-visible and unignorable, it's almost unheard of for a celebrity to devote himself to politics instead of torpid self-indulgence and craven reputation-management. Brand deserves a lot of credit for having a go, even if the world's just as unfair now as it was when he started. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Made by**  
Russell Brand  
Michael Winterbottom  
**Producer**  
Melissa Parmenter  
**Written by**

Michael Winterbottom  
**Director of Photography**  
James Clarke  
**Editor**  
Marc Richardson

**Sound Recordist**  
Will Whale  
**Production Companies**  
Studiocanal presents

A Revolution Films  
and Branded Films  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Nik Linnen  
Andrew Eaton

Jenny Borgars  
Danny Perkins  
**With**  
Russell Brand

**In Colour**  
**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

Mixing grassroots reportage with stunts intended to embarrass those with money and power, the controversial British comedian Russell Brand delivers a bitter attack on corporate capitalism. In between polemical pieces to camera, he draws attention to the growing wealth gap by attempting (unsuccessfully) to gain access to financial institutions in the City of London in order to ask questions about the incompetence and dishonesty he perceives among the industry's elite. Among his key points is the discrepancy between the bankers

responsible for the 2008 crisis – none of whom has gone to prison – and the looters who stole low-value goods during the Tottenham riots in 2011, who were convicted and imprisoned in large numbers. He also turns his ire on corporate and individual tax evasion and suggests that globalisation has exacerbated inequality. Interviewing low-paid people, those affected by welfare cuts and protesters fighting the sell-off of the New Era housing estate in Hackney, he argues that direct action is the only way to achieve change and promote social justice.



## The First Film

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: David Nicholas Wilkinson



Target London: 51° North

the last ever taken of humanity – begging the question of who's on the space station and what their technical resources might be.

Moritz von Zeddelmann inhabits the role of the unlikeable last cameraman on Earth thoroughly, demonstrating Damon's many shortcomings in deadpan style – making you wonder why any higher power, human or extraterrestrial, would pick Damon Miller rather than, say, Frederick Wiseman, to make such a momentous documentary. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Alex Souabni Grigori Richters	<b>Companies</b> Starmus presents a Films United production A film by Grigori Richters	<b>Dolly-Ann Osterloh</b> Ann
<b>Script</b> Grigori Richters	<b>Executive Producer</b> Hamish Jenkinson	<b>In Colour</b> [1.78:1]
<b>Story</b> Grigori Richters Moritz von Zeddelmann	<b>Distributor</b> Films United	
<b>Director of Photography</b> James Kinsman	<b>Cast</b> Moritz von Zeddelmann Damon Miller Steven Cree Michael Burlington Steve Nallon Professor Richards Jamie Doyle Frank Adam Jackson- Smith Light Miller	
<b>Edited by</b> David Milkins		
<b>Music</b> Brian May		
<b>Sound</b> Marc Specter Enos Desjardins Udit Duseja		
<b>©Grigori Richters Production</b>		

London, present day. German-American vlogger Damon Miller becomes popular thanks to a series of quirky, autobiographical videos, and goes into partnership with hustling producer Michael Burlington. Damon is hired by the UK Space Agency to make a series of YouTube videos about asteroids; he becomes obsessed with the subject, alienating a large part of his audience and putting a strain on his business partnership with Michael. Damon's girlfriend Ann discovers she's pregnant and – worried by his erratic behaviour – leaves him. Damon is kidnapped by mysterious agents who offer to give Ann – and her unborn son, Light – a place on a space station, which will ensure their survival when the planet is destroyed by a meteor in 17 days' time; in return, Damon must chronicle the last days of mankind. He films the crowds and the city, which empties when it becomes known that London will be the point of impact. The meteor destroys Earth. In the future, Light edits and narrates Damon's footage.

### Reviewed by Dylan Cave

The inventor Louis Aimé Augustin Le Prince is well known to those interested in the history of the moving image. A Frenchman who spent much of his professional life in Yorkshire, Le Prince developed a single-lens camera on which he shot several scenes in Leeds during October 1888. The three film fragments that survive are thought to be the world's first successful moving pictures. Guinness World Records notes that one of the fragments – *Roundhay Garden Scene* – is the oldest film in existence, yet Le Prince's achievements aren't recognised as widely as those of Muybridge, Edison or the Lumières. In *The First Film*, director David Nicholas Wilkinson seeks to redress this, asserting that film begins not with the Lumières in Paris in 1895, but seven years earlier, in Leeds.

The Le Prince story entices because it challenges our common understanding of the origins of cinema, but it's a complex and incomplete tale. Wilkinson attempts to bring together the diverse strands, combining details of Le Prince's personal life with information about the professional climate in which he was working. Curators, historians and experts are brought in to illuminate different aspects of the story, exhibiting lovingly crafted replicas of Le Prince's 16-lens and single-lens cameras, discussing the intricacies of patent law and talking us through a rogues' gallery of 19th-century cinema practitioners.

In many ways the Le Prince tale embodies the Victorian era – his ambition, talent and pioneering spirit fit the romantic ideals of the glorious age of invention. But he suffered an untimely demise that could have come from the pages of a penny dreadful: in September 1890, months before he planned to present his filmed images to a US audience, Le Prince allegedly boarded a train from Dijon to Paris and was never seen again. There has been much speculation about his fate, and Wilkinson explores the various theories in order to assess whether Le Prince's bizarre disappearance was in any way connected to his achievements. Having captured moving images with a patented camera as early as 1888, he was clearly ahead of the field, and the idea of a murderous competitor has been put forward. However, *The First Film* debunks this notion almost immediately, with a former chief superintendent putting forward



Romantic Leeds: David Nicholas Wilkinson

the much more plausible theory that if Le Prince was indeed murdered, it was more likely to have been because of an inheritance dispute.

When media historian Stephen Herbert reveals the seating arrangements that Le Prince drew up for a screening, it underlines just how close the inventor came to being the first to show a film in public. It serves too to emphasise the cruelty of history, reinforcing the fact that, due to his untimely disappearance, Le Prince missed out on the crowning moment of public exhibition that the Lumières achieved. If *Roundhay Garden Scene* doesn't quite represent the acknowledged beginning of cinema, Wilkinson is nevertheless able to assert that it represents the first 'film' (though even here some qualification is required, since the 'film' in Le Prince's camera was not cellulose nitrate but Eastman paper film).

In the final analysis, *The First Film* tells Le Prince's story with fine attention to detail, but the mysteries and controversies remain. What's more satisfying, perhaps, is the view of archivist Mark Rance, who argues that Le Prince's aesthetic sense is of greatest interest. The choice of angles and framing in *Roundhay Garden Scene* in particular, together with its eccentric characters and playful tone, suggest a different sensibility to the other pioneers working at the time.

Constantly engaging, *The First Film* might not entirely convince us that cinema was born in Leeds in 1888, but it makes a compelling case for Le Prince as film's founding father. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producer</b> David Nicholas Wilkinson	<b>Sound</b> Christopher Barnett Johan Maertens	<b>John Chittock</b> Foundation present a Guerilla Docs production	<b>Tony Earnshaw</b> Joe Estzerhas Paul Goodman Louise A. Handley Michael Harvey Ronald Harwood Stephen Herbert Daniel Martin Mick McCann Beatrice Neumann Tony North	<b>Mark Rance</b> Katherine Round Liz Rymer Irfan Shah Laurie Snyder Gordon Trewinnard Carol S. Ward Adrian Wootton	voice over readings
<b>Writers</b> David Nicholas Wilkinson Irfan Shah	<b>Andrew Black</b> Patrick Hanlon Ryan Jay	<b>Executive Producers</b> Doug Abbott Robert Worcester	<b>With</b> Bernard Atha Tom Courtenay Nigel Cross Quentin Dowse	<b>With</b> Stephane Cornicard Sarah Lancashire Ben Eagle	presenter David Nicholas Wilkinson
<b>Cinematographers</b> Don McVey David Beaumont Liam Ayres	<b>©Guerilla Films</b> (LePrince) Ltd <b>Production</b> Companies Guerilla Group/ Robert Worcester/				<b>In Colour</b>
<b>Editor</b> David Hughes					<b>Distributor</b> Guerilla Films
<b>Composer</b>					

A documentary about Louis Le Prince (born 1841), the French inventor and entrepreneur who filmed moving images with a single-lens camera in 1888. Director David Nicholas Wilkinson sets out to show that Le Prince's surviving fragments should be considered the first films ever made. He traces Le Prince's biography

and makes contact with one of Le Prince's descendants, who offers access to the family archive. Film curators and historians explain the technical principles of Le Prince's camera and the competitive environment in which he was working. Le Prince's career ended when he mysteriously disappeared in 1890.



## The Forgotten Kingdom

USA/South Africa 2012  
Director: Andrew Mudge

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Lesotho, the poor, mountainous nation entirely surrounded by South Africa, is, as the title of this coming-of-age drama suggests, a place the youthful Johannesburg-dwelling protagonist has long since left behind. Only when Zenzo Ngqobe's Joseph loses his father does he return to the family's ancestral homeland for the burial – to confront who he is, where he comes from, and where he belongs.

Having spent his early childhood in Lesotho the country is not altogether new to him, though cameraman Carlos Carvalho's contemplative images of sundry expansive craggy vistas and surprisingly verdant uplands provide a striking contrast to the bustling city streets and township squalor that outline the usual South Africa on screen. That sense of discovery gives the piece a genuine freshness, which might in part also be attributable to writer-director Andrew Mudge's outsider status – he's an American who first visited Lesotho when his brother was a Peace Corps volunteer there. However, while the largely non-professional cast speaking in Sesotho bring their own brand of credibility, knowing the filmmaker's interloper background potentially suggests that this first feature to be shot in Lesotho lacks the degree of authenticity it might have had were the key creative voice someone more local.

That said, *The Forgotten Kingdom* makes a strong case for itself. It's one thing to pen a script about a city boy reconnecting with his rural heritage and embracing the tribal lore he'd previously dismissed, quite another challenge entirely to bring it off. Mudge's restrained, lucid approach generally succeeds in avoiding contrivance, and the film is held together by Ngqobe's astute central performance (convincingly cagey for the most part, but opening up emotionally when required). There is also a beguiling hint of the supernatural, with a recurring vision of the dead father as a spirit-guide clad in



Back to the land: Lebohlang Ntsane

traditional ethnic blanket and a seemingly telepathic connection between Ngqobe and Nozipho Nkelemba's rural love-interest Dineo. Fair to say, though, that the script waxes a bit too poetical at times, not least when the lippy wise-child orphan (first-time actor Lebohlang Ntsane) who tags along en route proffers philosophical insights way beyond his years and background, opining, for instance, "The universe is unforgiving when you don't listen to it."

Still, at least the film has the wit to avoid any simplistic presentation of up-country Lesotho as some wondrous paradise where the old tribal ways still hold sway. Instead it confronts the nation's terrifying Aids statistics head-on, making Dineo's younger sister one of those stricken, and depicting a family torn apart by her stern father's inability to look beyond the social stigma of her condition. Giving the sufferer her own voice rather than showing her as a mute, sad-eyed representation of the country's crisis would have deepened the story yet further, but this element does add welcome grounding to a film whose infectious, sincere and winning positivity sometimes threatens to get the better of it. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced By**  
T.R. Boyce, Jr.  
Pieter Lombard  
Cecil Arthur Matlou  
Andrew Mudge  
**Written by**  
Andrew Mudge  
**Director of Photography**  
Carlos Carvalho  
**Edited by**  
Andrew Mudge

**Production Designer**  
Ockert Van Rooyen  
**Music**  
Robert Miller  
**Sound Mixer**  
Harry Botha  
**Costume Supervisor**  
Julie Hand  
  
©TFK, LLC.  
**Production Companies**

A Black Kettle Films and Binary Film Works production in association with ZenHQ Films and Strongman  
This film was made with support from IFP and in part by a grant from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for

AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)  
**Executive Producers**  
Chris Roland  
Terry Leonard

**Cast**  
**Zenzo Ngqobe**  
Joseph, Atang  
Mokoanya  
**Nozipho Nkelemba**  
Dineo

**Lebohlang Ntsane**  
orphan boy  
**Jerry Mofokeng**  
Katlheo  
**Moshoeshoe Chabelli**  
priest  
**Jerry Phela**  
Atang's father  
**Lillian Dube**  
clinic doctor  
**Reitumetse Qobo**

**Nkoti**  
  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Subtitles**  
  
**Distributor**  
Munro Film Services

Johannesburg, present day. City-dwelling black youth Joseph returns to his estranged father's township shack to discover that the old man has died alone, though not before paying for a funeral in his native Lesotho. A reluctant Joseph travels with the makeshift casket to the rural community of Mapotsane, his own early childhood home. After the burial, he's cheered to re-encounter his childhood acquaintance Dineo, a schoolteacher who cares for her Aids-stricken sister Nkoti. Joseph returns to the city, but is drawn back again to Mapotsane by his affection for Dineo, only to discover that her father Katleho has moved the family to the other side of the mountains. Accompanied by a seemingly all-knowing village orphan boy, and encouraged by visions of a

tribal elder spirit-guide, Joseph travels on horseback across country, continuing on foot when their horses are stolen. When they reach their destination, Joseph embraces Dineo and is ready to ask her father for her hand. Although a changed Joseph makes a strong impression, Katleho has already promised Dineo to wealthy businessman Mokebe. When Mokebe collects his bride, however, Dineo wants to drop Nkoti at the Aids clinic; seeing Mokebe insist on putting her in the boot of his car prompts Katleho to call off the wedding and realise his love for Nkoti, despite the social stigma attached to her condition.

Joseph gets off the bus taking him back home, leaving his orphan companion behind as he makes for the mountains and Dineo.

## Four Corners

South Africa 2013  
Director: Ian Gabriel

### Reviewed by Tim Hayes

*Four Corners* begins in Cape Town's Pollsmoor Maximum Security Prison, before transferring to the city's Cape Flats area, a sand-covered plain of townships where large numbers of non-white households were compelled to settle during South Africa's years of apartheid. Here, the Numbers Gangs, whose sphere of influence has spread out from their original prison fiefdoms, demand fealty from many residents – especially the adolescents recruited into their ranks from the street.

All this is drawn from real life, and in bringing the Numbers Gangs to the screen, director Ian Gabriel and his writers take detectable care to avoid depicting them as implacable gangsters – or not merely that, anyway. Recently released from prison, Farakhan, holder of the rank of general in the 28s, deals summarily with the man who killed his father; but this is only to right an outstanding wrong. He immediately attempts a symbolic adjustment of his past identity by removing a gang tattoo with a hot iron, and turns his attention towards an entirely honourable quest to reconcile with the son who does not know him, alongside a tentative romance with the next-door neighbour. Clearly his chances of not being pulled back in are minimal, though Brendon Daniels plays the part with a soulful authority, as a tough nut with painful bruises as well as hardened scars. Not for nothing has Farakhan acquired the nickname Lee Marvin among both friends and foe.

As if to emphasise this relatively equivocal view of the gangs, the film's police force is at best well-meaning or ineffectual. Altruistic family man Tito and his colleague Coltrane turn out to have differing agendas, neutralising their net benefit to the youngsters of the Cape Flats area compared with the sense of identity provided by the Numbers Gangs. While the insertion into the narrative of a serial killer preying on children is a rather ungainly manoeuvre, yielding some prosaically vengeful character motivation and an overripe running time, it also invokes a cruel and



Gang life: Brendon Daniels



random universe in which the gangs are at least a bedrock of reliable brotherhood and certainty.

At one point the almost clueless Tito consults a local medium for advice about the case, and for a moment the film threatens to flirt with the plentiful supply of ghosts lurking in the South African soil, before returning to more solid matters of foundation and permanence. Farakhan arrives to settle a score with the man now living in his father's house, noting that an unwelcome new exterior wall has appeared and pointing out that it will soon be gone again. The sand dunes of Cape Flats eventually yield up their corpses, while bringing Tito to his knees. Only Pollsmoor Prison and the men inside it seem immutable. "I'll protect your rank," prison capo Charlie (played by imposing former 28s gang boss Turner Adams) tells the departing Farakhan. "Until you come back." **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Cindy Gabriel  
Genevieve Hofmeyr

**Written by**  
Hofmeyr Scholtz  
**Screenplay**  
Hofmeyr Scholtz  
Terence Hammond

**Director of Photography**  
Vici Turpin

**Editor**  
Ronelle Loots

**Production Designer**  
Chris Bass

**Original Score**  
Markus Wormstorm

**Sound Mixer**  
Ivan Milborrow

**Costume Designer**  
Sylvia van Heerden

©Four Corners  
Productions  
(Pty) Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
Giant Films &

Moonlighting  
Films present in  
association with  
the Industrial  
Development

Corporation of South  
Africa Ltd and The  
National Film &  
Video Foundation  
of South Africa

A film by Ian Gabriel  
Developed with  
the support of  
the Berlinale Co-  
production Market  
& the No Borders  
International  
Co-production  
Market - IFP

Produced with the  
assistance of the  
Department of  
Trade and Industry  
South Africa  
**Executive Producers**

Marvin Saven  
Ian Gabriel  
Basil Ford  
Trishana Thevnarain

### Cast

**Brendon Daniels**  
Farakhan  
**Lindiwe Matshikiza**

Leila  
**Irshaad Ally**  
Gasant

**Abduragman Adams**  
Tito

**Jerry Mofekeng**  
Manzy

**Israel Makoe**  
Joburg  
**Jezriel Skei**  
Ricardo

**Turner Adams**  
Charlie, 28 Mamboza

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Munro Film Services

Cape Town, present day. Farakhan, a member of a gang called the 28s, is released from prison. He aims to settle a score with the man now living in the home of his dead father, and to reunite with his young son Ricardo, who is unaware of Farakhan's identity. Farakhan's father's house is in the territory of a rival gang, the 26s, and Farakhan's arrival causes friction. Having reclaimed the property, Farakhan erases one of the tattoos marking him as a member of the 28s and resolves to foster a more peaceful community. He meets neighbour Leila, a doctor visiting Cape Town from London to bury her father, and the pair recall that they were childhood friends. Meanwhile Ricardo is cautioned by police captain Tito, who grows concerned for the boy's welfare. Tito is also looking for a murderer known as the Dune Killer.

Ricardo falls in with Gasant, a member of the 26s. Gasant and a number of the 26s – including Ricardo – attack Farakhan at his home, but he faces them down. Ricardo runs off, and later encounters Tito's police colleague Coltrane, who is in fact the Dune Killer. Coltrane attacks Ricardo, who overcomes him and shoots him dead. Tito realises that Ricardo was at the scene of the incident. Gasant again sends Ricardo to kill Farakhan; this time Farakhan reveals that he is the boy's father. The resulting confrontation leaves Tito and Gasant dead, and Ricardo seriously injured. Farakhan and Leila save Ricardo's life.

## Gascoigne

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Jane Preston  
Certificate 15 90m 11s

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

Towards the end of *Gascoigne*, its subject looks back over his career and describes it as essentially a fairytale: local boy plays for hometown club. But if the Paul Gascoigne story really is a fairytale, you'd have to conclude it's the kind that involves a curse. Though one of the most gifted footballers ever to pull on an England shirt, Gascoigne fell agonisingly short throughout his career. He lost semi-finals at the World Cup and European Championships to Germany; he wrecked his childhood dream of winning the FA Cup by hospitalising himself with a reckless tackle in the 1991 final; a move to Italy was marred by injury, and success in Scotland by sectarian death threats.

The strength of Jane Preston's documentary is Gascoigne's willingness to speak with real candour. He talks as he played, on pure impulse, whether he's joking about the time he kissed Princess Diana's hand before a game ("Only match I ever played with a hard-on") or recalling the trauma of seeing a childhood friend killed by a car. With just three other interviewees, however, there's little attempt here to depict Gascoigne in the round. Jose Mourinho and Wayne Rooney burble hyperbole: "amazing", "incredible", "fantastic". Gary Lineker's memories of his England and Tottenham teammate are more revealing, but have the over-rehearsed naturalism of a regular after-dinner speaker.

Gascoigne's life since retirement has been fraught, a toxic combination of regret, drink, drugs and family fallouts. Preston's film is, however, a straightforward celebration of Gazza, reserving just ten of its 90 minutes for his post-football struggles. Footage of Gascoigne is easily found on YouTube; this could have provided much more. **S**



Kicking off: Paul Gascoigne

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Paul van Carter  
Nick Taussig  
Jane Preston  
**Director of Photography**  
Patrick Smith  
**Edited by**  
Olivia Baldwin  
**Music**  
**Composed by**  
Chad Hobson  
Ian Masterson  
**Sound Recordist**  
Andy Paddon

©Gascoigne the  
Movie Limited  
**Production Companies**  
Salon Pictures  
presents in  
association with  
Splice TV a Salon  
Pictures production  
and a One Films  
co-production  
A film by Jane  
Preston  
**Executive Producers**  
Joel Kennedy

Alex Hamilton  
Christopher  
J. Reynolds

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
EI Films

A documentary about the life of English footballer Paul Gascoigne, from his childhood in the north-east to his career playing for Newcastle United, Tottenham Hotspur, Lazio, Rangers and England.

## Heaven Adores You

USA 2014  
Director: Nickolas Rossi  
Certificate 12A 104m 57s

### Reviewed by Frances Morgan

This subtle portrait of musician Elliott Smith is likely to draw comparisons with *Montage of Heck*, Brett Morgen's recent documentary about Nirvana's Kurt Cobain. Born in the late 1960s, Cobain and Smith were key players in the tight-knit alternative music scenes of the small cities of the Pacific Northwest during the 1980s and 90s. Both, after struggling with depression and addiction, died violent deaths – Cobain by suicide, Smith by suspected suicide (his stabbing still carries an open verdict). There is a suggestion – in Morgen's film but also in other accounts such as Nick Broomfield's *Kurt & Courtney* (1998) – that the shock of sudden fame and the music industry's venality contributed greatly to Cobain's death in 1994. It's punk orthodoxy as cautionary tale: selling out comes at a price.

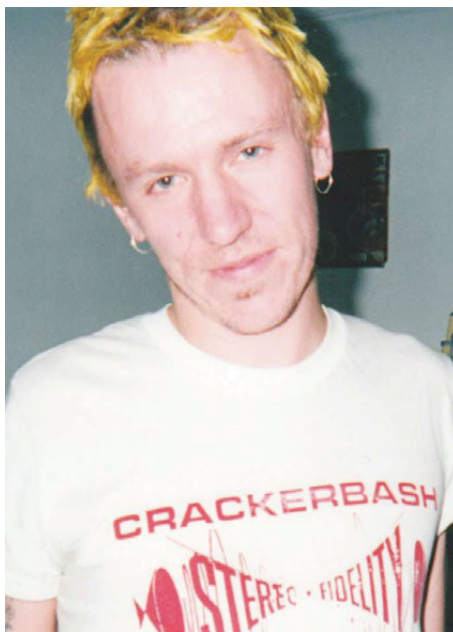
At first, *Heaven Adores You* threatens to set up a similar dynamic, though Smith never became the star, nor the martyr, that Cobain did. It starts with Smith's unlikely appearance at the 1998 Oscars, where he performed 'Miss Misery', a track nominated for Best Original Song for its use in Gus Van Sant's *Good Will Hunting*. This was a turning point for Smith: he signed to a bigger label, performed on TV and saw his audience grow rapidly. "It was difficult to see how difficult it was for him," says a former bandmate about the media attention. No one says outright that success killed him, but in jumping ahead to the same interviewees recalling their reactions to Smith's death six years later, over shots of makeshift shrines outside his house, director Nickolas Rossi makes the connection fairly clear.

It is a dramatic but unpromising opening, suggesting a hagiography mired in clichés. However, the rest of the film takes a different approach, focusing on the music to the point that some might feel more attention could have been paid to Smith's personal narrative. A musical life is mapped out, from Smith's goofy high-school band Stranger Than Fiction to his Portland punk group Heatmiser, and then the increasingly accomplished solo records whose titles loosely frame chapters of the film.

There is relatively scant footage of Smith in circulation, and Rossi uses little of what's out there, instead creating a visual narrative around locations. There are lingering shots of city skylines, bridges and suburban streets, and many tracking shots taken from car or train windows. This alludes to Smith's restlessness – he moved to New York City, then to LA, where he died – but also mirrors the melancholy in his music, its sense of constant goodbye. Rossi favours Smith's waltz-like songs – 'Last Hour', 'True Love' – and Takoma-style instrumental sketches for these drifts, rather than his more poppy compositions.

Despite this sense of transience, Portland is at the heart of the film. The city provided Smith with a genuinely supportive community, one that seemed to understand rather than resent his departure. Interviews with former bandmates and the owner of the Kill Rock Stars label, Slim Moon, provide important context about the post-hardcore milieu of the early 90s; Larry Crane, a producer who is now keeper of Smith's archive, describes how the singer helped him set up the prolific local recording studio Jackpot!





Portland made me: Elliott Smith

Smith's struggles with alcohol and heroin are touched on delicately, when they are talked about at all. If the intention is to deflect attention away from prurient conspiracies, then *Heaven Adores You* succeeds, making a case for Smith as a potentially classic songwriter whose work was more than merely autobiographical. As photographer Autumn de Wilde says, "He wasn't always playing himself in his songs. There's just enough of his diary in there to make you feel that it's real, and then he takes half of it away and gives it over to you."

Smith was one of several American musicians schooled in punk rock who drew on pop, country and soul to make introspective, bittersweet songs at the tail end of the 20th century and became minor cult figures. Like that of Will Oldham, Cat Power and Jeff Tweedy's Wilco, the aura around Smith's music was co-created by its listeners; their views would have been welcome here. 📧

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Nickolas Rossi  
**Producer**  
Jeremiah Gurzi  
Kevin Moyer  
Marc Smolowitz  
**Directors of Photography**  
Jeremiah Gurzi  
Nickolas Rossi  
**Editors**  
Nickolas Rossi  
Eli Olson  
**Original Score**  
Kevin Moyer

**Sound Re-recording Mixer**  
John McClain  
**@Heaven Adores You LLC**  
**Executive Producers**  
Charles J. Akin  
Wesley Hirni  
Noah Lang  
Haroula Rose  
Erick Paulson  
**In Colour**

[L78:1]

**Distributor**  
Specticast/  
Munro Films

A documentary about the life and music of Elliott Smith. It includes interviews with collaborators, family members, producers and friends, alongside radio and TV interviews with Smith himself.

Smith was brought up in Texas and began writing songs as a teenager. Moving to Portland, Oregon, he formed the band Heatmiser, and went solo in the mid-1990s. His unfinished album 'From a Basement on the Hill' was released in 2004 after his death, aged 34, from stab wounds, possibly self-inflicted.

## Home

USA 2015  
Director: Tim Johnson  
Certificate U 93m 41s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

The first DreamWorks Animation film was *Antz* in 1998. The 31st cinema feature under that banner, *Home* arrives at a time when the studio has never looked so precarious. In January, DreamWorks Animation announced that it was shutting one of its main bases and laying off 500 people. This followed several costly cartoons with inadequate returns, including last winter's *Penguins of Madagascar* (2014), which had looked safe with its avian stars.

*Home* is a good film but might not be good enough to reverse DreamWorks' fortunes. It's a foes-to-friends comedy about a teen girl and a childish alien, with frame-filling spectacle (its budget was a reported \$132 million), invention and charm. But its characters lack the chemistry and personality of the best cartoon creations, and sometimes seem subsidiary to *Home*'s story concept.

Like many recent cartoons, the film is a science-fiction spoof. Advanced but bumbling aliens come to Earth, suck up humans in giant tubes and deport them painlessly to Australia, claiming the rest of the world for themselves. Left behind, girl Tip is desperate to find her mother and teams up with a friendless, clueless alien manchild called Oh. He's a simple, plasticine-like blob on stubby tentacles who changes colour with his emotions; he's on the run after making one blunder too many.

*Home* is directed by Tim Johnson, who co-directed *Antz* 17 years ago. Despite the increases in computing power, the films aren't so different. Both, for example, have spectacularly scaled fantasy settings – here the aliens' giant mothership, an airborne Eiffel Tower that crashes through the rooftops of Paris. *Home* also follows *Antz* in having a quirky, lightly political premise: the aliens think of themselves as benign colonials, blithely deporting primitive humans to reservations.

Inevitably there's a starry voice cast, with teen heroine Tip voiced by the singer Rihanna, whose songs figure on the soundtrack. Tip continues DreamWorks' run of engagingly plucky heroines, non-white this time (like Rihanna, Tip is from Barbados). Rihanna doesn't sound like a teenager but her voice meshes with the character, helped by earnestly expressive animation in key moments.

Jim Parsons from *The Big Bang Theory* voices the



The deported: *Home*

hapless Oh, who's given to mangled syntax ("Can I come into the outside now?") as he develops from a tooth-aching annoyance into a sweet and gentle friend. Steve Martin is a pompous alien captain, channelling Sacha Baron Cohen's lemur from the *Madagascar* films. Jennifer Lopez has a small part as Tip's mother, and also contributes a song.

Yet for all of Tip and Oh's amusing and touching scenes, they don't match up to their closest precursors, the protagonists of Disney's *Lilo & Stitch* (2002). That pair had an extra dimension – both were damaged, angry infants. In comparison, the shared neediness and misunderstandings between Tip and Oh raise smiles but nothing deeper. The characters are hampered by awkward pacing, as the film shifts too sharply from huge action set pieces to slow bonding scenes and back again. Consequently, the characters' emotions come to feel stilted, the action gratuitous.

Audiences still embrace cartoon films, as *Frozen* (2013) demonstrated. But they have become increasingly choosy, and this is the danger for *Home* and DreamWorks Animation. 📧

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Mireille Soria  
Suzanne Buirgy  
Christopher Jenkins  
**Screenplay**  
Tom J. Astle  
Matt Ember  
Based upon the novel *The True Meaning of Smekday* by Adam Rex  
**Editor**  
Nick Fletcher  
**Production Designer**  
Kathy Altieri  
**Music Composed by**  
Lorne Balfe  
Stargate  
**Supervising**

**Sound Designer**  
Randy Thom  
**Head of Character Animation**  
Jason Reisig  
**@DreamWorks Animation LLC**  
**Production Companies**  
Fox, DreamWorks  
Animation SKG

**Voice Cast**  
Jim Parsons  
Oh  
Rihanna  
Gratuity 'Tip' Tucci

**Steve Martin**  
Captain Smek  
**Jennifer Lopez**  
Lucy Tucci

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[L85:1]

**Some screenings presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox  
International (UK)

The present. Tentacled aliens called the Boov invade Earth, deporting humans to Australia. The Boov are on the run from another race, the Gorg. When Oh, an accident-prone Boov, tries to email a homewarming party invitation, he sends it into deep space, which will allow the Gorg to find Earth. Oh goes on the run, encountering a human girl, Tip, who was missed in the deportation and is desperately seeking her mother. They join forces, travelling to Paris by flying car and entering Boov headquarters, where Oh stops the invitation. Nonetheless, the Gorg find Earth; the Boov flee in their spaceship. Oh, who's learnt courage from Tip, saves them. Then he returns to Earth, unites Tip with her mother and gives the Gorg what they were after – a stone taken by the Boov captain which contains the Gorg's babies.



## Hustlers Convention

United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Director: Mike Todd

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

In this era of easy online research, sourcing and sharing, the rediscovery of a seminal cultural obscurity is a rarer phenomenon than it once was. It can appear as if every lost treasure has already been found, dusted off, tweeted about and ripped off for a mobile-phone advert.

Aficionados of spoken-word poetry, American civil-rights-era culture and early hip hop would likely sniff at the characterisation of the much sampled beats and rhymes of the Last Poets as obscure; but their work, which began in Harlem in the late 1960s, remains beneath the radar of the mainstream, their surviving members scarcely recompensed and their tempestuous story little known. This documentary seeks to redress the balance somewhat, with specific attention to the eponymous album, released by erstwhile Last Poet Jalal Mansur Nuriddin under the name of Lightnin' Rod in 1973. A concept album relating the underworld misadventures of an aspiring gangster, *Hustlers Convention* combined the influence of the politicised black poets of the Harlem Renaissance and the civil-rights movement, the funky soundtracks and sleazy glamour of blaxploitation cinema and the oral tradition of toasting, and foreshadowed much of what would go on to be called hip hop and especially gangster rap.


Directed by Brit Mike Todd, who previously made the documentary *Joe Frazier: When the Smoke Clears* (2011), this film talks to Nuriddin himself, to other Last Poets past and present and to figures from throughout the history of hip hop, as well as poets, academics, journalists and Last Poets/*Hustlers Convention* producer Alan Douglas. With many, many talking heads and no voiceover to provide a guiding narrative, it's a little hard to follow the order and meaning of events; no coherent timeline for the Last Poets' history is offered, and the album's narrative is illustrated through somewhat graceless animation sequences rather than being cogently explained. Still, enthusiasm for Nuriddin's work is palpable, and many of the contributions are thoughtful and wise.

A common thread is that *Hustlers Convention* is – in the words of Ice T – the “missing link” in hip-



**Toast of the town: Jalal Nuriddin**

hop history. “It would be impossible to tell the story of rap without it,” Chuck D says. A notable gap exists, however, in the film's own narrative: its odd failure to address the negative aspects of the culture that arose partly in homage to and imitation of *Hustlers Convention*, particularly in terms of gender. The film segues directly from the Last Poets' origins within political and social movements to *Hustlers Convention*'s glorification of gangsterism and especially pimping, without exploring why glamorised criminality suddenly rang so many more bells than idealism.

Nuriddin argues that the piece was intended as a cautionary tale, but this isn't what emerges as its main appeal in the anecdotes told by Fab Five Freddy and Ice T, about the cool pimps they knew who recited it. In all the talk of fighting oppression and representing the underclass, there's no discussion of the position of women, whom gangster rap would go on to characterise as bitches and whores. It's peculiar of the filmmakers to have had MC Lyte and Sonia Sanchez on hand and not to have asked them about this aspect. Discussion of the individualistic, materialistic and misogynistic currents that would develop in hip hop as it became a cultural phenomenon sometimes trembles at this film's edges – “There was a shift from hope, purpose, community-making, to nihilism,” says Greil Marcus of black culture at the close of the 1960s. But it isn't given the attention it demands, and that makes the film finally more of a fan letter than an analysis. 

## London Road


United Kingdom 2014  
Director: Rufus Norris  
Certificate 15 91m 35s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

*London Road* began life as a much praised National Theatre production in 2011, an arresting, disarmingly original docu-musical focusing on an Ipswich community that was both ruptured and ironically revitalised by the serial murders of five sex workers in 2006. Its screen potential isn't overwhelmingly apparent but this faithful conversion – again directed by new NT head Rufus Norris and with many of the original cast reprising their roles – is equally bracing, even if its principal stylistic gambit loses its novelty after a while. But perhaps more than the offbeat approach, what resonates in both versions is the touching but wholly unsentimental (and even unnerving) depiction of a neighbourhood emerging from under the shadow of tragedy.

Forged by Alecky Blythe from three years' worth of taped interviews and set to music by Adam Cork, *London Road* reproduces the recorded testimonies – from sex workers, police, media representatives and residents of the eponymous street that was also home to killer Steve Wright – completely verbatim. Conversational speech, with all its imperfections retained, becomes the bedrock for inventive, jittery musical narratives – a conceit startlingly triggered during an opening TV news bulletin, with the anchor's matter-of-fact delivery morphing into staccato song. One early sequence featuring nervy, suspicious Christmas shoppers is choreographed like Jacques Demy directing *M*, the massed chorus repeating “Everybody's very, very nervous... um... and very unsure... basically.” Blythe and Cork's soundtrack imaginatively connects ambient sounds with vocal pitch – the shrillness of a teenage girl's laugh mimicking the buzz of a store alarm. The clipped oration is redolent of the sample-based work of minimalist composer Steve Reich and, on another level, the TV work of Chris Morris, whose *Jam* included a sketch in which bereft parents burst into song at a police press conference. The comparison doesn't end there – Morris's *Brass Eye* imagined a musical inspired by Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe.

But while there is dark humour here – foremost, an exasperated location reporter repeatedly fluffing his takes while trying to describe the discovery of Wright's “cellular material” in pre-watershed fashion – the prevailing mode is frank, compassionate and never condescending. The musical element ultimately becomes an ingenious fit for the complex, heightened emotions stirred up by the terrible events, with reactions through the neighbourhood contrasting wildly. Some residents express their deep sorrow and revulsion, while others are just relieved that their street has latterly become a no-go area for surviving prostitutes.

The film is impeccably performed by a talented ensemble, with standout turns from Olivia Colman as tough neighbourhood-watch leader Julie and Paul Thornley as a green-fingered loner who's initially looked at askance by neighbours. Colman's Julie provides the film's most unsettling scene: a monologue in which she unapologetically declares she'd “like to shake his [Wright's] hand”, spoken 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Mike Hall  
Geseth Garcia  
Quenell Jones  
Lathan Hodge

#### Written by

Mike Todd

#### Director of

Photography

Quenell Jones

#### Editor

Mike Todd

#### Original Music

Chris Todd

#### Dubbing Mixer

Richard Lambert

#### Animation

Echo Bridge Pictures

©Riverhorse  
Communications Ltd

#### Production

Companies

Creative England

presents a

Riverhorse film  
Co-produced by BTN  
Eastlink and Hustlers  
Convention Ltd

Made with the  
support of Creative  
England through the  
BFI NETWORK and  
National Lottery

With additional  
support from  
films@59

A Riverhorse film  
in association with  
Bring the Noise  
Eastlink, Warehouse  
51 Productions

#### Executive

Producers

Chuck D

Carl Hall

#### Film Extracts

*Wild Style* (1982)

*Dolemite* (1975)

*Disco Godfather*

(1980)

*Sweet Sweetback's*

*Baad Asssss*

*Song* (1971)

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Distributor

Kaleidoscope Film

Distribution

**A documentary charting the emergence of the poetry and music collective the Last Poets from the black arts movements active in Harlem during the 1960s, and the making of the solo album 'Hustlers Convention' by one of their number, Jalal Nuriddin, in 1973. In the present day, Nuriddin prepares for a comeback concert in London, at which he will perform 'Hustlers Convention' for the first time in four decades. Cultural figures including Public Enemy frontman Chuck D, rappers KRS One, Ice T and MC Lyte, poets Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka, academic Khalil Gibran Muhammad and novelist Darius James discuss the roots of the Last Poets' style, its expression in 'Hustlers Convention' and its influence on the development of hip-hop. Past and present members of the Last Poets including Nuriddin himself discuss their work and the rifts and problems that kept them from fully capitalising on its popularity. Nuriddin plays in London, introduced by the black British poet Lemn Sissay.**





United front: Olivia Colman, Anita Dobson

while her daughter cringes on the sofa alongside her. Tom Hardy, again confined to a vehicle for the duration of his appearance following the one-man show *Locke* (2013), contributes an effective cameo as a serial-killer-obsessed cabbie who spooks out his fare.

Formerly disconnected, the community eventually unites in defiance to regenerate the area – garden competitions, evening meetings, a jubilant street party. Norris, his production designer Katrina Lindsay and DP Danny Cohen contrive artful ways to trace this faltering transformation. A surreal tableau at

the height of the media storm has the street and its residents smothered by a cat's cradle of endless interlocking police cordons; this later gives way to lines of innocuous, summery bunting threaded through the lampposts. Initially grey and washed-out, Cohen's palette subtly warms up as the community learns to unite. These deft visual touches prevent the film from betraying its stage origins too much, although a nagging feeling remains that the concept may work better theatrically than cinematically. Happily, though, little of the production's power has been lost in translation. **6**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Dixie Linder

#### Screenplay

Alecky Blythe

Based on the stage musical by Alecky Blythe, Adam Cork

#### Director of

Photography

Danny Cohen

#### Editor

John Wilson

#### Production Designer

Katrina Lindsay

#### Music

Adam Cork

#### Lyrics

Alecky Blythe

Adam Cork

#### Production

Sound Mixer

John Midgeley

#### Costume Designer

Edward K. Gibbon

@Cuba Pictures

(London Road)

Limited/British

Broadcasting

Corporation/The

British Film Institute

#### Production

Companies

BBC Films, BFI and

National Theatre

present in association

with LipSync and

supported by Arts

Council England a

Cuba Pictures and

National Theatre

Production

Additional early

development

funding by Film 4

Produced in

association with

Kreo Films

Made with the

support of the

National Lottery

through the BFI's

Film Fund

#### Executive Producers

David Sabel

Nick Marston

Tally Garner

Christine Langan

Joe Oppenheimer

Beth Patinson

Norman Merry

Peter Hampden

#### Cast

Olivia Colman

Julie

Clare Burt

Sue

Rosalie Craig

Kelly McCormack

Anita Dobson

June

James Doherty

Seb

Kate Fleetwood

Vicky

Hal Fowler

David Crabtree

Linzi Hateley

Helen

Paul Hilton

Tim

Nick Holder

Ron

Claire Moore

Councillor Carole

Michael Shaeffer

Simon Newton

Nicola Sloane

Rosemary

Paul Thornley

Dodge

Howard Ward

Terry

Duncan Wisbey

Gordon

Tom Hardy

Mark

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Picturehouse

Entertainment

A musical dramatisation, based on recorded interviews, about an Ipswich community transformed by the murders of five sex workers in 2006. The various residents of London Road – an area that had seen a significant increase in prostitution – recall the atmosphere of paranoia and suspicion that permeated the community as the killings continued. When the police charge London Road resident

Steve Wright with the murders, his neighbours find themselves in the glare of media attention. Their individual reactions range from horror at the crimes to relief that the solicitations and kerb-crawling have ceased. Surviving sex workers declare the area off-limits. Wright is found guilty and jailed for life. Rallying together to rebuild the community, the residents throw a street party.

## The Longest Ride

USA 2015

Director: George Tillman Jr

Certificate 12A 127m 49s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

There are two types of nostalgia in fiction: one made for people who love the style of a bygone era, and one for people who love bygone values and manners. Nicholas Sparks has largely made a career out of the latter, using extraordinary circumstances to illustrate inoffensive, sensible relationship advice (eg "It's okay for couples to fight" in *The Notebook*) and to show how faith and love can help anyone pull through tragedy, as long as they believe (eg *A Walk to Remember* and *The Last Song*).

In a grand act of auto-nostalgia, *The Longest Ride* repurposes elements of many of the aforementioned novels/films in ways that might be obvious to those who haven't bothered to see any of them. Luke Collins (Scott Eastwood, son of Clint), a top-ranked bull rider, happens to meet art student Sophia Danko (Britt Robertson) at his comeback rodeo; on their first date, they realise that they can't *really* be together because Sophia is leaving for an internship at a New York City art gallery in two months. (In the film's cruellest turn, "New York City internship" is passed off as a golden ticket to fruitful employment.) However, on the rainy, solemn drive home from that date, they save the aged Ira Levinson (Alan Alda) and a box of letters to his wife Ruth from a flaming car, and through those letters/lengthy flashbacks to the 40s and 50s, Sophia and Luke learn that "relationships require compromise".

Ruth and Ira's relationship parallels the ups and downs of Sophia and Luke's in ways that are uninterestingly linear – the couple in the past (played by John Huston's grandson and Charlie Chaplin's granddaughter) split up when the couple in the present split up, etc. What the dual plots *do* provide is what the audience really wants: lots of old-fashioned romance. In every Sparks novel/film, the male protagonist is The Most Romantic Man Ever, either having his secret woo-pitching skills unlocked by the right lovely young girl or just shooting white-hot streams of wholesome ardour all over the place to attract his soulmate. Both Luke and Ira are unparalleled in their devotion immediately, while the rest of the male species, never really shown, get strawmanned as uncouth, horny brutes. (At one point, Sophia switches her car



Million dollar baby: Scott Eastwood



# Mad Max: Fury Road

USA/Australia 2015  
Director: George Miller  
Certificate 15 120m 3s

radio from a groaning pop song to a crooning country ballad, synecdoche for the entire story.)

Unlike Sparks's past fables, this one actually, unapologetically includes sex, which director George Tillman Jr shoots in a way that's not totally over-the-top. Tillman also approaches the rest of the material with admirable inventiveness, using GoPro cameras and slow motion during the bull-riding scenes to capture the energy, terror and lengthy snot trails involved the sport. Luke's motivations for staying in the bull-riding business, despite its dangers and Sophia's protestations, are essentially identical to those given in Nicholas Ray's *The Lusty Men* (1952) – which, unlike this, is worth your time, the entire time. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Marty Bowen  
Wyck Godfrey  
Nicholas Sparks  
Theresa Park  
**Screenplay**  
Craig Bolotin  
Based upon the novel by Nicholas Sparks

### Director of

**Photography**  
David Tattersall  
**Film Editor**  
Jason Ballantine

### Production

**Designer**  
Mark E. Garner

### Music

Mark Isham

### Production

**Sound Mixer**  
Carl S. Rudisill

### Costume Designer

Mary Claire Hannan

©Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and

TSG Entertainment

Finance LLC

### Production

**Companies**  
Fox 2000 Pictures

presents

A Temple Hill/

Nicholas Sparks

production

A George Tillman

Jr film

Made in association

with TSG

Entertainment

Participated in

the New York

State Governor's

Office for Motion

Picture & Television

Development

Post Production

Credit Program

### Executive

**Producers**  
Michele Imperato

Stabile

Robert Teitel

Tracey Nyberg

### Cast

**Britt Robertson**

Sophia Danko

**Scott Eastwood**

Luke Collins

**Jack Huston**

young Ira Levinson

**Oona Chaplin**

young Ruth

**Alan Alda**

Ira Levinson

**Lolita Davidovich**

Kate Collins

**Melissa Benoist**

Marcia

**Gloria Reuben**

Adrienne Francis

Naomi Eckhaus

Ruth

### Colour by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

### Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)



Jump leads: Tom Hardy

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

"Those guys wouldn't have been champion when I was around," Mike Tyson once said, looking over the men who'd held the heavyweight belt during his prison stint, "I went away... and that made them competitive for a time." George Miller, who made his directorial debut with 1979's exemplar of vehicular action *Mad Max*, hasn't been in the cooler like Tyson (or John McTiernan), but recently he has concerned himself with franchises involving talking pigs (*Babe*) and soft-shoeing penguins (*Happy Feet*). In the 30 years since *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*, a number of champs have come and gone, and the car chase has become a game of featherlight pixels floating about. Now the wait is over, and the weight is back.

Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* is a hammer-down, cast-iron-plated, diesel-exhaust-belching manifesto on the physics of screen action, a metamechanics monster truck show with

everything but a Robosaurus. It is something like the rundown in the last third of *The Road Warrior* (1981) stretched to feature length – I don't believe I have seen a film on this scale so single-mindedly dedicated to the heat of pursuit since, well, Mel Gibson's *Apocalypse* (2006). The man the tabloids have dubbed Mad Mel has been deemed unsafe-at-any-speed for a franchise property, so the role of Max Rockatansky has now gone to sensitive silverback Tom Hardy. It's a downgrade – though it would be misleading to suggest that Hardy is being asked to 'carry' the movie. His Max spends much of *Fury Road* being jerked hither and thither by forces beyond his command, first picked up by the corpse-paint-pallid 'War Boy' soldiers serving water-hoarding dictator King Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne, *Mad Max*'s main heavy, unrecognisable beneath oxygen-mask headgear), then throwing in his lot with renegade Imperator Furiosa (Charlize Theron, sporting a prosthetic arm), who's made off with

## Credits and Synopsis

### Produced by

Doug Mitchell

George Miller

PJ Voeten

### Written by

George Miller

Brendan McCarthy

Nico Lathouris

### Director of

**Photography**  
John Seale

### Editor

Margaret Sixel

### Production Designer

Colin Gibson

### Music

Tom Holkenborg

aka Junkie XL

### Re-recording Mixers

Chris Jenkins

Gregg Rudloff

### Costume Designer

Jenny Beavan

### Supervising Stunt

Co-ordinator

Guy Norris

©Warner Bros.

Feature Productions

Pty Limited

### Production

**Companies**  
Warner Bros.

Pictures presents

in association with

Village Roadshow

Pictures a Kennedy

Miller Mitchell

production

A George Miller film

With the assistance

of the Namibian Film

Commission, the

New South Wales

Government

Produced with the

assistance of the

Department of

Trade and Industry

South Africa

### Executive Producers

Iain Smith

Chris DeFaria

Courtney Valenti

Graham Burke

Bruce Berman

Steve Mnuchin

### Cast

**Tom Hardy**

Max Rockatansky

**Charlize Theron**

Imperator Furiosa

**Nicholas Hoult**

Nux

**Hugh Keays-Byrne**

Immortan Joe

**Rosie Huntington-**

**Whiteley**

The Splendid

Angharad

**Riley Keough**

Capable

**Zoe Kravitz**

Toast the Knowing

**Abbey Lee**

The Dag

**Courtney Eaton**

Cheedo the Fragile

**Dolby Atmos**

**In Colour**

[2.35:1]

### Some screenings

presented in 3D

### Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

Las Vegas, present day. Luke Collins is violently thrown from a bull during the Professional Bull Riders World Finals and is seriously injured.

North Carolina, a year later. College senior Sophia Danko is cajoled into seeing a rodeo, the first Luke has competed in since his accident. Luke's cowboy hat falls next to her, and later they exchange numbers. Their first date ends abruptly after Sophia explains that she's moving to New York in two months' time for an internship at an art gallery. On their way home they rescue an elderly man, Ira, and his box of letters from the flames of a crashed car. Sophia visits Ira at the hospital, and through the letters learns about his relationship with his wife Ruth. A Viennese Jew, Ruth wanted lots of children but Ira was wounded in WWII and became impotent. Despite this, they stayed together and collected art.

Luke and Sophia grow closer, but after Luke suffers another bad injury while riding, Sophia insists that he stop. He refuses and they break up. Ira dies and Sophia is invited to a private auction of Ira and Ruth's multimillion-dollar art collection. Luke purchases for \$600 a painting of Ruth, and is bequeathed the entire collection. Sophia and Luke reconcile. Luke runs his father's ranch and Sophia works at an art gallery in North Carolina.

The Wasteland, 45 years after the fall of civilisation. Max Rockatansky, former police patrol officer now wandering alone, is captured by War Boy soldiers in the service of King Immortan Joe, to be held in his Citadel and used as a living blood bank for Nux, one of the anaemic War Boys. Imperator Furiosa, one of Joe's commanders, leaves the Citadel in a converted oil tanker called the 'War Rig', on what is meant to be a routine gas raid, then abruptly goes AWOL. She is hauling Joe's harem as contraband, and is heading for the green fields of her youth. Joe follows in pursuit, taking with him a group that includes Nux and a still-imprisoned Max. After a freak sandstorm

frees him, Max joins forces with Furiosa and the War Rig party. Furiosa and Max temporarily seal their pursuers in a canyon pass, but the latter catch up and one of Joe's heavily pregnant wives is killed in the resulting skirmish. Nux, injured and separated from Joe's army, defects and joins the War Rig party. After further combat, Furiosa leads the party to her ancestral home, only to find that the former paradise is now a desert, and only a few women remain of her matriarchal tribe. Max forms a plan for the War Rig party to slip into the Citadel ahead of Joe and foment rebellion. They do so, killing Joe, and are greeted as liberators. Max slips away in the ensuing celebration.



one of Joe's armoured trucks and his five-woman harem, driving headlong into the arid wasteland with three armies at her heels.

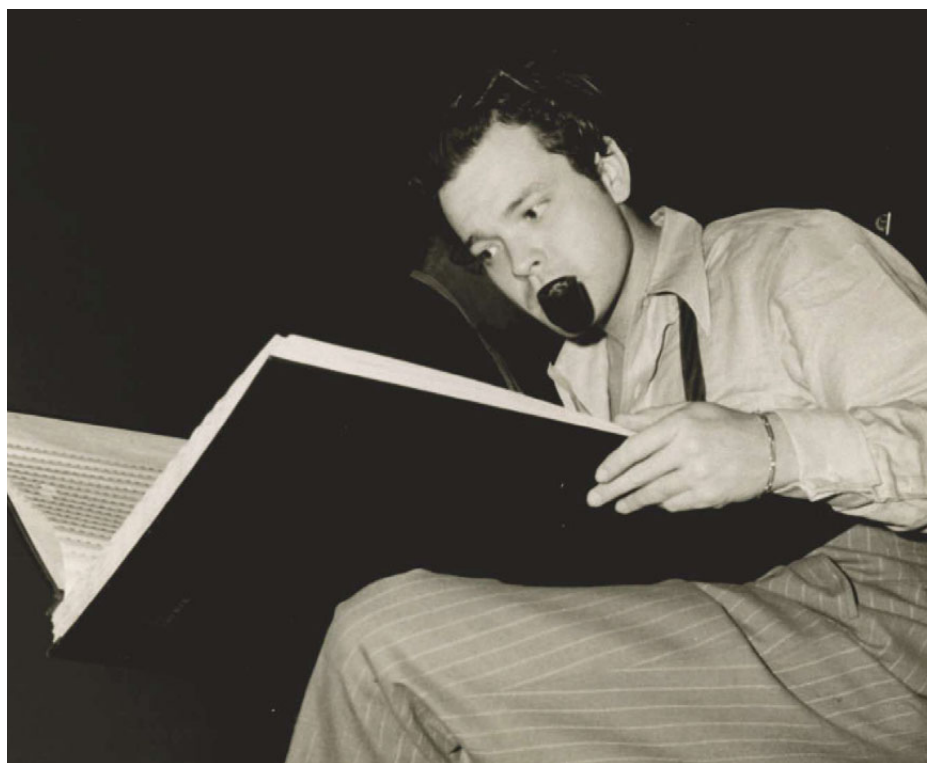
From humble, homemade origins, each *Max* movie has trebled in size, and *Fury Road* is the metastasized endpoint. Miller is making an epic, and has chosen his visual references accordingly: Joe's 'Citadel' reproduces the high and low strata of Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), while the flight across the desert, replete with a sandstorm whipped up by a freak cyclone, evokes the Old Testament shock and awe that evaded Ridley Scott's *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. Shot in the Namib Desert of south-west Africa by DP John Seale, *Fury Road* has a palette that's all ochre by day, cobalt by night. It seems that the eco-crisis which has scorched the earth has brought with it an infertility epidemic, but we are given to understand only as much of the actual mechanics of the society that has emerged since "the world fell" as we can glimpse in the rear-view. The camera is almost perpetually in motion, and when it isn't, everything else is; the dialogue, mostly shouted, is half-heard over the roar of a V8 engine.

This isn't haphazard storytelling: Miller knows that stopping off for exposition breaks will cost him valuable speed. Max, Furiosa and the others speak of their world – or rather *don't* speak of it – as people who are accustomed to living in it might, and save their breath for matters of practical exigency, which is to say survival. How do you steer without a wheel? Use a wrench! How do you free yourself of harpoons in the rear end of your truck? Get back there with a bolt-cutter! How do you keep a commandeered vehicle moving when you're about to abandon ship? Use the huge, gouty foot of an obese, recently deceased steampunk J.P. Morgan with an ornate false nose and holes in his waistcoat to accommodate his chained nipple rings!

It is a movie of split-second decisions, cut-the-crap materialistic down to the very last particular, where every bullet in a clip (and the one in the chamber) and every centimetre of leeway counts, as in a startling moment where Max saves his skull by catching a crossbow bolt in the meat of his palm, one of several score of gasp-inducing details. Given that the aesthetic of the *Mad Max* franchise has influenced visual culture every bit as much as that of *Metropolis* or *Blade Runner* (1982), from the 'California Love' music video to the *Fallout* videogame series to every post-apocalyptic film to come in its wake (including recent Aussie entry *The Rover*), it is remarkable that *Fury Road* manages to be at once familiar and yet consistently surprising, not to say astonishing. Moments of ooh-aahh ingenuity include bomb-tossing dirt bikers being target-shot from the sky like clay pigeons; gymnastic 'polecats' swooping in from tall, limber staffs on fulcrums; and an armada of vehicles sprung from the minds of madly inspired chop-shop Frankensteins, each one reduced to its constituent parts in turn, accompanied by awesome through-the-windshield acrobatics. Miller even has the confidence to elide one major set piece, rendering carnage as faint orange flash in the fog, and a distant flapping of crows. So, in the presence of the real deal, shall bloviated franchises and committee blockbusters scatter to the wind. 🍌

## Magician The Astonishing Life and Work of Orson Welles

USA 2014, Director: Chuck Workman, Certificate 12A 91m 22s



Casting a spell: Orson Welles

See Feature  
on page 26

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Another late-blooming doc-biopic for the generation of film students and green-eared cineastes born, perhaps ruefully, after the release of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Chuck Workman's assemblage is surprisingly thoroughgoing, given that it tackles what many dozens of full-length biographies and critical studies have already covered ad nauseam.

Orson Welles remains one of cinema history's great elusive bastards, simultaneously the medium's biggest martyr to corporate profit and its most spectacular flame-out, victim and self-destroyer, majestic egomaniac and downbeaten couch-sleeper, florid self-deprecator and helpless liar. The conundrums and extremities, and their readable significances, could justify a Zizek-narrated ten-hour miniseries, but for now, and yet again, Workman's respectful and brisk survey takes us from the Kenosha childhood to the *enfant miraculeux* years of amateur and then professional theatre, the famous landmark productions of the 30s on stage and on radio, the leap to Hollywood, the stomach-churning ascent and long descent and sprawling out into being not just a filmmaker but a personality, a character star, a pitchman and a pariah. As Welles's last years and unfinished projects are totalled up, one cannot help but remember and be galled by the memorial salute solemnly given to him at the 1986 Academy Awards ceremony by George Lucas and Steven Spielberg – either of whom could have saved the never-finished *The Other Side of the Wind*, among other uncompleted projects, with what their production companies spent on coffee.

Workman puts the blame for Welles's notorious difficulties half on Hollywood, half on Welles,

predictably. There are new interviews from the likes of Peter Brook, Walter Murch, Simon Callow, Norman Lloyd, Oja Kodar, Peter Bogdanovich and so on, and reams of old interviews, with Welles and dozens of other luminaries, that reach back decades but are never signed with a year. There's plenty of blame to go around – Welles himself behaved deplorably but so did RKO, William Randolph Hearst, his critics, his investors, his stepfather and even his audience. (We get a glimpse of the hate mail Welles received after the shock of the 1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast, declaring him to be "contemptible, cowardly and cruel" and "morally guilty of murder, if not legally".) Scholar/biographer James Naremore comes closest to nailing down Welles's paradigm, saying that he posed "an ideological challenge to Hollywood". Workman doesn't elaborate on this notion, as he might have if he'd dared to analyse his subject instead of just lionising him. But it hews close to the bone – an 'artist' among Hollywood's small nation of artisans, moneymakers, bookkeepers and showmen was always a destabilising presence, an inherent threat to the democratised low-bar idea of mass entertainment; it's a tension that remains in film culture to this day, no matter how doggedly old-school auteurs try to glean and celebrate the artist's choices amid the mountain of mid-century studio product. An inattentive filmgoer, focused on actors and story, could miss the auteurist touch in a Cukor or even a Sirk, but no one with eyes could fail to see Welles in every frame of his films, and that's what doomed him as an American filmmaker.

But of course Welles was never quite claimed by doom; Workman structures his film with each of Welles's 11 major features from *Kane* to *F for Fake*, focusing on the pioneering and legacy as much as the historical passage of life events,



## Mr. Holmes

USA/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Bill Condon

Certificate PG 104m 2s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

The 93-year-old Sherlock Holmes of Bill Condon's film version of Mitch Cullin's novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind* is haunted by versions of himself – all of which are fake but seem more authentic than the real thing.

We first meet the ageing detective on a visit to Japan, poking around in the ruins of Hiroshima in search of a miracle herb. He disappoints the mother of his Japanese host when – in a melancholy paraphrase of Billy Wilder's witty *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970) – he sadly admits that he didn't bring the deerstalker or the pipe of his popular image because they were added by the illustrators of his friend John Watson's fictionalised accounts of his adventures. Later, peeling back another layer of reality, he admits that he did once smoke a pipe, but stopped because he felt ridiculous when he looked like the heroic version of himself created and accepted by Watson and the public. At one point he even sits in a matinee audience to watch *The Lady in Grey*, a plausible film version of a fictional fiction (Watson's 'The Case of the Dove-Grey Glove'), in which a black-and-white Holmes is played by Nicholas Rowe, erstwhile star of Barry Levinson's *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985).

Ian McKellen plays Holmes in old-age makeup by Dave Elsey by way of Dick Smith circa *Little Big Man*. It is 1947, and Holmes is living in retirement in Sussex with his housekeeper Mrs Munro (Laura Linney) and her son Roger (Milo Parker), spending his time writing his journal and tending his bees. Young Roger scorns his mother for barely being able to read and delights in the puzzles of Holmes's cases and his apiary pursuits. Mrs Munro, meanwhile, sees the dangers of such aspirations, since her mechanic husband sought to be promoted out of the motor pool during the war, only to be killed in action as part of a bomber crew.

The reteaming of Condon and McKellen, in another story about an elderly genius and a conflicted protégé, evokes 1998's *Gods and Monsters*, whereas a moment in which the ancient

Holmes contorts himself to assume the pose of the girl in Andrew Wyeth's painting *Christina's World* echoes Terry Gilliam's film of Cullin's *Tideland* (2005), which is to *Alice in Wonderland* what *Mr. Holmes* is to Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes canon.

There are several mysteries to be solved here – though Holmes's only real success is in pinning a mass-stinging on some wasps to exonerate his own bees – but the thrust of the story is to question the point of solutions that don't help anyone. In particular, Holmes reflects on his final case, in which a woman, Mrs Kelmot, seemed to be plotting her husband's murder but was in fact planning her own death. Holmes saw through the contradictory plot but couldn't determine her commitment to suicide. *Gods and Monsters* also hinged on a murder-cum-suicide plot and an ageing genius, the director James Whale, struggling with the loss of his faculties and using his undimmed skills to bring down the curtain on his achievements in style.

McKellen's Holmes, repressed where Whale was open, is another awards-worthy performance... although, in representing a frail and fragile human character, he isn't really playing Sherlock Holmes except when he puts it on (when Roger insists he "do the thing" and rattle off deductions) or makes it up (as in the final dramatised solution to the Japanese case, which incidentally features a perfect micro-cameo from John Sessions as Mycroft Holmes).

There has been a debunking tendency in Holmes films and fiction since Wilder, from the psychological reductionism of Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* to the depiction of the great detective as a high-functioning sociopath or Chaplinesque scruff in recent TV and film versions. But *Mr. Holmes* plays a subtler, more affecting game while retaining a fondness for Doyle's characters and their depths – note the perfect, wordless reaction of a tea-bearing Mrs Hudson (Sarah Crowden) as she overhears her employer blithely assuring Mr Kelmot that his wife's miscarriages oughtn't to have upset her too much. ☹

and it's far from a desolate record. As many interviewees say, Welles struggled but triumphed by essentially improvising and mutating his own independent production process, in the States and then in Europe, decades before ambitious filmmakers were generally working in any such fashion. A museum's worth of ephemera is also folded in – FBI investigation documents from J. Edgar Hoover, bits of old radio plays, ads for films never made, family photographs, newspaper clippings (putting to rest the revisionist cant about how little panic the *War of the Worlds* show actually created) and so on.

All of it is worth study, but Workman's agenda, as it has always been through his 30-year-plus career of celebrity docs and promotional films, is to put an effortless gloss on the cultural history, suitable for a mezzo-educated primetime. Thus, a degree of triviality is employed (restaurateur Wolfgang Puck is quizzed about watching Welles eat), and interviews are chopped into often puzzlingly fragmented soundbites. You couldn't say that Welles is being disrespected by the doc's curtailing, glib speed and elisions – no one disrespected Welles in the name of showbiz more than Welles – because there's only so much fact and so much interpretation one can sardine-pack into a two-hour film. But any budding Wellesian should use Workman's movie only as a primer, before going deep. ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Charles S. Cohen	<i>Black Magic</i> (1949)	<b>James Naremore</b>
<b>Cinematography</b> John Sharaf	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (1944)	<b>Elvis Mitchell</b>
Tom Hurwitz	<i>Compulsion</i> (1959)	<b>Jonathan Rosenbaum</b>
Michael Lisnet	<i>The Long Hot Summer</i> (1958)	<b>Henry Jaglom</b>
<b>Edited by</b> Chuck Workman	<i>Crack in the Mirror</i> (1960)	<b>Joseph McBride</b>
<b>Sound Editing</b> Patrick Cicero	<i>History of the World Part I</i> (1981)	<b>Beatrice Welles-Smith</b>
	<i>Touch of Evil</i> (1958)	<b>Peter Brook</b>
	<i>American Graffiti</i> (1973)	<b>Walter Murch</b>
	<i>Follow the Boys</i> (1944)	<b>Eric Sherman</b>
	<i>Macbeth</i> (1948)	<b>Costa-Gavras</b>
	<i>F for Fake</i> (1975)	<b>Richard Linklater</b>
	<i>The Third Man</i> (1949)	<b>Oja Kodar</b>
	<i>The Trial</i> (1962)	<b>Buck Henry</b>
	<i>Mr Arkadin</i> (1955)	<b>Richard Benjamin</b>
	<i>Get Shorty</i> (1995)	<b>Wolfgang Puck</b>
	<i>The V.I.P.s</i> (1963)	<b>Stefan Drössler</b>
	<i>Me and Orson Welles</i> (2009)	<b>Peter Viertel</b>
	<i>Ed Wood</i> (1994)	<b>Michael Dawson</b>
	<i>Brunnen</i> (2005)	<b>Paul Mazursky</b>
	<i>The Muppet Movie</i> (1979)	<b>Frank Marshall</b>
	<b>Unfinished Films</b>	
	<i>The Dreamers</i>	
	<i>The Deep</i>	
	<i>The Merchant of Venice</i>	
	<i>It's All True</i>	
	<b>With</b>	
	<b>Simon Callow</b>	
	<b>Christopher Welles Feder</b>	
	<b>Joanne Hill Styles</b>	
	<b>Norman Lloyd</b>	
	<b>Julie Taymor</b>	
	<b>Paolo Cherchi Usai</b>	
	<b>Peter Bogdanovich</b>	

Using interviews, memorabilia and archival footage, this documentary surveys the life and filmmaking career of Orson Welles, from his birth in 1915 to his death in 1985.

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Anne Carey	<b>Carter Burwell</b>	<b>Entertainment an</b>	<b>Len Blavatnik</b>	<b>Madame Schirmer</b>	<b>In Colour</b>
<b>Archer Gray/See-Saw</b>	<b>Production</b>	<b>Archer Gray/See-Saw</b>	<b>Aviv Giladi</b>	<b>Hattie Morahan</b>	<b>[2.35:1]</b>
<b>Iain Canning</b>	<b>Sound Mixer</b>	<b>Films production</b>	<b>Vince Holden</b>	<b>Ann Kelmot</b>	
<b>Emile Sherman</b>	<b>David Bowtle-McMillan</b>	<b>A Bill Condon film</b>		<b>Phil Davis</b>	<b>Distributor</b>
<b>Screenplay</b>	<b>Costume Designer</b>	<b>This production</b>		<b>Inspector Gilbert</b>	<b>El Films</b>
<b>Jeffrey Hatcher</b>	<b>Keith Madden</b>	<b>participated in The</b>	<b>Cast</b>	<b>Patrick Kennedy</b>	
<b>Based on the novel</b>		<b>New York State</b>	<b>Ian McKellen</b>	<b>Thomas Kelmot</b>	
<b><i>Mind</i> by Mitch Cullin</b>		<b>Governor's Office</b>	<b>Sherlock Holmes</b>	<b>John Sessions</b>	
<b>Director of</b>		<b>for Motion Picture</b>	<b>Laura Linney</b>	<b>Mycroft Holmes</b>	
<b>Photography</b>		<b>and Television</b>	<b>Mrs Munro</b>	<b>Frances Barber</b>	
<b>Tobias Schliessler</b>		<b>Development</b>	<b>Milo Parker</b>	<b>matinée 'Madame</b>	
<b>Editor</b>		<b>Post Production</b>	<b>Roger</b>	<b>Schirmer</b>	
<b>Virginia Katz</b>		<b>Credit Program</b>	<b>Hiroyuki Sanada</b>	<b>Nicholas Rowe</b>	
<b>Production Designer</b>		<b>Executive Producers</b>	<b>Tamiki Umezaki</b>	<b>matinée 'Sherlock</b>	
<b>Martin Childs</b>			<b>Roger Allam</b>	<b>Holmes</b>	
<b>Music Composed by</b>			<b>Doctor Barrie</b>		
			<b>Frances De La Tour</b>	<b>Dolby Digital</b>	

Japan, 1947. Sherlock Holmes is visiting Umezaki Tamiki, who believes that the great detective was involved in his father's disappearance – though the ageing Holmes can't remember meeting the man.

Returning to Sussex, where he has retired to keep bees, Holmes tries to recall the details of the case that made him quit his profession. In flashback he recalls Ann Kelmot, who seemed to be plotting her husband's murder. Holmes deduced that in fact she intended to

kill herself, but he couldn't dissuade her from suicide.

Roger Munro, young son of Holmes's housekeeper, becomes the detective's assistant. When Roger is found badly stung, Holmes deduces that his bees are innocent and that the culprits are wasps from a nearby nest. Roger recovers. Realising that he might have saved Ann if he'd acted more like the Holmes of his friend Watson's accounts, Holmes writes to Umezaki with a bogus but satisfying explanation for his father's disappearance.



## The Priest's Children

Croatia/Serbia 2013  
Director: Vinko Bresan  
Certificate 15 96m 20s

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Considering that it tackles sexual subterfuge, unwanted pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage, paedophilia, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, unhappy marriages, suicide and religious attitudes to all the above, *The Priest's Children* has a consistently breezy and upbeat tone that might initially come as a surprise. However, it's squarely in line with director/co-writer Vinko Bresan's two-decade career of satirising local taboos: his films often use an isolated Adriatic island setting to create efficiently graspable microcosms of Croatian society. *How the War Started on My Island* (1996) alluded to this in its title, while *Marshal Tito's Spirit* (1999) charted the reactions of people right across the capitalist-communist spectrum to rumours of the former dictator's resurrection.

Here the island is overseen by the local Catholic Church, whose former representative Father Jakov was a popular, energetic and highly visible presence. His socially maladroit successor Father Fabijan is more concerned with the bigger picture, specifically the island's rock-bottom birth rate. To this end, after realising that abstract sermonising about sexual morality has no noticeable effect, he takes the drastic step of sabotaging the entire local contraceptive supply – which dramatically achieves his statistical ambitions but also triggers numerous not entirely unexpected side effects for which he proves hopelessly ill prepared.

Sensibly, given numerous pointed barbs aimed at Fabijan's employers, Bresan, co-writer Mate Matic (author of the source play) and lead actor Kresimir Mikic maintain audience sympathy by characterising Fabijan as a befuddled naïf with an overarching determination to do right by his calling. Indeed, one of the film's key themes is the very thin line between spirituality and sociopathy, as demonstrated by Fabijan's evident surprise that there might be a significant human downside to unwanted pregnancy and Church-enforced marriage. As he finds out much too late, it's easy to play God if you really are soaring above the human populace, but much less so if you still have to live among them on a daily basis.



101 Dalmations: Kresimir Mikic

Despite occasional stylisation (Fabijan narrates the early part of his story on screen, and the various permutations of the activities of suspected fornicators are played out in live action against a brilliant white backdrop), much of the film is a straightforwardly rumbustious Eastern European crowd-pleaser, with pratfalls and gurning interspersed with comedy-of-embarrassment scenes such as the one in which newsagent Petar explains the purpose of strawberry-flavoured condoms to an appalled Fabijan.

Fabijan and a couple of others aside, the islanders are straight from Croatian central casting, with most of them distinguished by a single eccentricity – pharmacist Marin is a war veteran (hence his rabid xenophobia and substantial arms cache), religious fanatic Ana is as obsessed with José Carreras as the other JC, and so on. But with several huge local hits under his belt (including this one), Bresan clearly knows his market well, and handles numerous tonal swerves with aplomb, right up to the final punchline – which demonstrates that even the confessional isn't ultimately sanctified against an all too human urge to gossip. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Ivan Maloca  
**Screenplay**  
Mate Matic  
**Script Collaborator**  
Vinko Bresan  
Based on the play  
*Svećenikova djeca*  
by Mate Matic  
**Director of**

**Photography**  
Miro Pivčević  
**Editor**  
Sandra Botica Bresan  
**Art Director**  
Damiir Gabelica  
**Sound Recordist**  
Marton Jankov  
**Costume Designer**  
Zeljka Franulovic

©Interfilm, Zillion Film  
**Production Companies**  
Interfilm & Zillion Film, HAVC, Eurimages  
A film by Vinko Bresan  
Supported by Hrvatski Audiovizualni Centar, Ministarstva

Kulture Republike Srbije, Eurimages  
**Executive Producer**  
Maja Vukic

**Cast**  
Kresimir Mikic  
Father Fabijan  
Niksa Butjter

Petar  
Marija Skaricic  
Marita  
Drazen Kühn  
Marin  
Lazar Ristovski  
bishop  
Jadranka Dokic  
Crazy Ana

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Cinefile

Croatian  
theatrical title  
*Svećenikova djeca*

Croatia, the present. Father Fabijan is assigned to a remote Dalmatian island, replacing the extremely popular Father Jakov. Keen to make a difference, Fabijan vows to address the issue of the island's low birth rate. With newsagent Petar and pharmacist Marin, he sabotages the island's condom supply and replaces contraceptive pills with vitamins. The birth rate rockets, and so does the tourist trade, thanks to belief in the effect of local waters on fertility. Following DNA tests on her lovers, Fabijan orders the teenage Vesna to marry Jure, her baby's father. An abandoned baby boy is left on Fabijan's doorstep and is adopted by Petar and his infertile wife. Distraught over his son's death, Luka kidnaps his pregnant

girlfriend so that she cannot obtain an abortion within the legal limit; she suffers a miscarriage in captivity. Appalled, Fabijan attempts to confess his actions to the visiting bishop, but is praised for his initiative. Unable to cope with marriage and fatherhood, Jure threatens to kill himself. The abandoned baby's mother turns out to be religious fanatic Ana. Petar is worried that the child might have inherited similar tendencies, but keeps him after Ana is found drowned. Jakov confesses to Fabijan that he had a fling with a choirgirl. Accepting responsibility for the chaos, a distraught Fabijan tells the entire story to his younger colleague Simun in the form of a formal confession. Simun goes to 'confess' to another priest...

## Queen & Country

Ireland/United Kingdom/France 2014  
Director: John Boorman  
Certificate 15 114m 33s

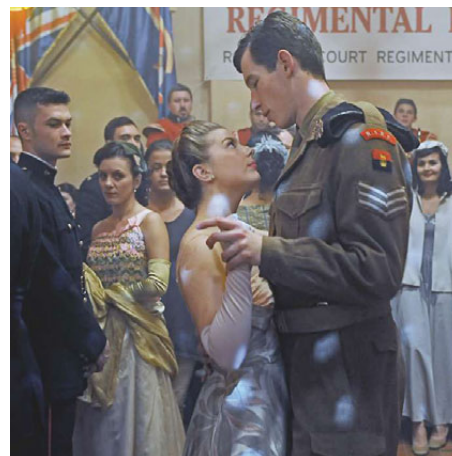
See Feature  
on page 48

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In *Hope and Glory* (1987), John Boorman lovingly recreated his own childhood as a nine-year-old boy revelling in the excitement and disruption of WWII. Now, nearly 30 years on – and nine years since his last feature, the little-seen Irish-set comedy-thriller *The Tiger's Tail* – he picks up the story of his alter ego Bill Rohan (Callum Turner) a decade later, as he's conscripted into the army in the early 50s. One of the most fondly remembered moments in *Hope and Glory* comes when the kids, arriving at school to find it's taken a hit from a stray German bomb, erupt in delighted yells, and it's this scene that opens the new film. "Thank you, Adolf!" shouts a boy, as young Bill's gleeful face morphs into his 18-year-old self.

Continuity established, Boorman provides further links to the earlier movie: the Rohans' riverine house (on Pharaoh's Island in the Thames); Bill's put-upon dad (David Hayman again) and wistfully unfaithful mum (Sinead Cusack); the proximity of Shepperton Studios. This relaxed domestic set-up serves as a contrast to the paranoid, spit-and-polish world of an Aldershot training camp, where Bill is sent and where, as his skiving mentor Private Redmond (Pat Shortt) tells him, "Everyone in the army's trying to get away with something." Based closely, according to Boorman, on his own experiences while a conscript, *Queen & Country* juggles various storylines: the plot by Bill's chancer friend Percy (Caleb Landry Jones) to steal the regimental clock to infuriate the RSM; the pettifoggery of regulations-obsessed Sergeant Major Bradley (David Thewlis); Percy's flirtation with a pretty nurse (Aimee Ffion-Edwards) and his more serious attraction to Bill's sister Dawn (Vanessa Kirby); Bill's abortive court-martial for political subversion, and his fixation on the neurotic, elusive 'Ophelia' (Tamsin Egerton). In the background, meanwhile, we get the Korean War, the death of George VI and the coronation of Elizabeth II.

All of which could make for a rich mixture – or an episodic clutter. Regrettably, *Queen & Country* veers towards the latter, at times feeling like chunks of an army-sitcom TV series cut down to feature length. It's saved from inconsequentiality, though, by the warmth and nostalgia of Boorman's regard, and his vivid recreation of an awkward, flailing,



Lost world: Aimee Ffion Edwards, Callum Turner



## Results

USA 2015  
Director: Andrew Bujalski  
Certificate 15 104m 42s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

One of the routine frustrations of the generic contemporary romantic comedy is that the man and woman who will inevitably get together are separated by contrivance and the need to hit feature-length running time rather than actual obstacles and incompatibilities. Not so the three corners of the love triangle in Andrew Bujalski's Austin-set fifth feature *Results*, who all have real and interesting problems worth delving into. Gym owner/trainer Trevor (Guy Pearce) wants to expand his business at a new, larger location but lacks the necessary capital. His star personal trainer Kat (Cobie Smulders) gets disproportionately furious when clients fail to share her commitment to fitness, and hasn't considered what she's going to do with her life once she's too old for her job. As for Kevin Corrigan's newly minted millionaire (via an inheritance from his long-estranged mother) Danny, he's a lonely stoned schmuck: freshly divorced, alone in a mansion, with no support group and an impossible crush on Kat.

*Results* represents Bujalski's attempt to make a film that, in his words, "can exist in the marketplace". Hence a number of features new to his work: professional actors with name value, popular music soundtrack cues, slick digital lensing (from regular collaborator Matthias Grunsky) and a romantic-comedy structure that culminates with not one but two big kisses. Despite these concessions towards a potential audience that presumably would be unamused by the carefully scripted inarticulacies of his first three classically mumblecore films (*Funny Ha Ha*, *Mutual Appreciation*, *Beeswax*) or the disconcerting innovations of *Computer Chess*, *Results* is thoroughly strange in many ways.

The structure is consistently disorientating and unpredictable. Top-billed Pearce is barely present for the film's opening stretch, leading viewers to wonder whether he's just name-above-the-title bait; instead, the focus is on angry Kat and mopey Danny. The first half of the movie takes place over a period of several weeks; after a *Rocky*-esque montage compressing some months into a few minutes, the second half unfolds over a 24-hour period. The love triangle is often sublimated to Pearce's professional goals, and the movie doesn't seem to be bluffing about the details of running a small business generally or a gym specifically; as in *Beeswax*, Bujalski admirably conveys the sense that he knows exactly what he's depicting, a rarity in a national cinema that often treats working life as at best a time-filling irrelevance.

In casting two members of the Marvel universe as his leads, Bujalski has cleverly appropriated their buff bodies for ends other than superheroic combat; Smulders, for example, runs plausibly and is presumably as fit as her character. (Which is what it takes to be a professional female actor in a Hollywood that makes very specific claims on women's bodies, but that's another story.) Whereas Bujalski's previous films relied on 16mm grain (and old video technology in *Computer Chess*) for visual texture while otherwise sticking to handheld cinematography intended to emphasise performances, here he tries out shot composition for its own sake. When Kat and Danny first meet at his mansion to discuss his

post-war Britain, struggling to come to terms with a bewilderingly changing world. That sense of desperately clinging on to outmoded, meaningless conventions is embodied in the film's standout performance: Thewlis's Sergeant Major Bradley, so tightly packed into his uniform that his face seems about to burst. Cruelly tricked by Bill and Percy into violating his own revered army regulations and hauled up before the CO (Richard E. Grant, wearily sardonic), he erupts in a deranged harangue: "I'm what a soldier should be... I am the army!"

At the end of the film – and in a further link back to its predecessor, where the young hero was fascinated by glimpses of filmmaking on the river – we see Bill/Boorman, now back in civvy street, taking his first tentative steps into his future profession. Foreshadowings of a further sequel, perhaps? **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Kieran Corrigan  
John Boorman  
**Written by**  
John Boorman  
**Director of Photography**  
Seamus Deasy  
**Film Editor**  
Ron Davis  
**Production Designer**  
Anthony Pratt  
**Original Score**  
Stephen McKeown  
**Sound Mixer**  
Dragos Stanomir  
**Costume Designer**  
Maeve Paterson

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**Production Companies**  
IFB and BFI presents

in association with  
Le Pacte, a Merlin Films production  
**Executive Producer**  
Jean Labadie  
**Film Extracts**  
Seven Samurai/  
Shichinin no Samurai (1954)  
*Hope and Glory* (1987)

#### Cast

**Caleb Landry Jones**  
Percy Hapgood  
**Callum Turner**  
Bill Rohan  
**David Thewlis**  
Sergeant Major Bradley  
**Pat Shortt**  
Private Redmond  
**Brian F. O'Byrne**  
Regimental Sergeant Major Digby

**Tamsin Egerton**  
'Ophelia'/Helen  
**Vanessa Kirby**  
Dawn Rohan  
**Sinead Cusack**  
Grace Rohan  
**David Hayman**  
Clive Rohan  
**Richard E. Grant**  
Major Cross  
**Aimée-Ffion Edwards**  
Sophie Adams  
**Gerran Howell**  
Private Kitto

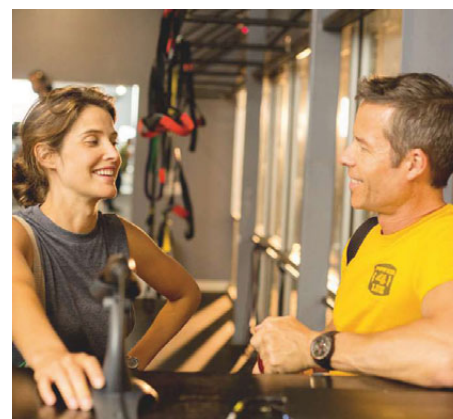
**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Curzon Film World

England, 1952. Eighteen-year-old Bill Rohan is called up for National Service. At training camp in Aldershot he meets Percy Hapgood and they become friends. Most of their fellow conscripts are sent to fight in Korea, but Bill and Percy are promoted to sergeant and assigned to train new recruits to type, helped by Private Redmond, a cunning skiver. Sergeant Major Bradley, a stickler for petty regulations, often hauls them up before the commanding officer, Major Cross, who wearily dismisses the charges. At a concert, Bill and Percy meet two nurses, Sophie and Peggy, but Bill pursues a mysterious girl he names 'Ophelia'. On weekend leave, Bill is delighted to find that his older sister Dawn has divorced and returned from Canada. Percy visits and is very taken with her.

Private Kitto refuses to go to Korea, saying that Bill has convinced him it's a futile war. Bill is court-martialled but talks his way out of it. He visits Ophelia (real name Helen) in Oxford, fights her older lover and leaves. Bill and Percy conspire to set up Bradley for breach of regulations, and Major Cross has him confined to quarters. In hospital after a suicide attempt, Helen rejects Bill; Sophie has sex with him to comfort him. With Redmond's help, Percy steals the prized regimental clock. The RSM, suspecting Redmond, threatens him with Korea, and Redmond sells Percy out; Percy is sent to Shepton Mallet military prison. Dawn promises to wait for him. Bradley suffers a breakdown and Bill visits him in mental hospital.

Discharged, Bill returns home to Shepperton and, with Sophie, starts making his first forays into filmmaking.



**Mutual appreciation:** Cobie Smulders, Guy Pearce

fitness goals, he is sitting on a sofa (still covered in plastic) to the right, elevated on a podium, while she is down below, stage left, on a shabbier couch; the asymmetry and visual imbalance provoke a laugh before anything's said.

From the moment of its Sundance premiere, *Results* has prompted some viewers to criticise what they perceive to be an attempt to make a generic indie romcom in the Duplass brothers vein. Yet despite its superficial sheen, *Results* is discernibly another projection of Bujalski's strong voice. Kat joins the ranks of *Funny Ha Ha*'s Marnie and *Beeswax*'s Jeannie as a well-written, 'complex' female character, which is to say that she actually has dimensions to her personality and the film clearly doesn't worry that making her punchy will make her 'unlikeable'. There's still a strong emphasis on awkward two- and three-person interactions, in which every seemingly casual conversational faux pas is carefully (and hilariously) timed. *Results*, then, gets results; whether it's been defanged enough for mainstream audiences remains to be seen, but it's nothing like a sellout. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Houston King  
Sam Slater  
Paul Bernon  
**Written by**  
Andrew Bujalski  
**Director of Photography**  
Matthias Grunsky  
**Editor**  
Robin Schwartz  
**Production Designer**  
Michael Bricker  
**Music**  
Justin Rice  
**Sound Mixer**  
Patrick Wylie  
**Costume Designer**  
Colin Wilkes  
©Results Movie LLC  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Burn Later Productions,  
Houston King Productions  
**Executive Producers**  
Greg Stewart  
Sev Ohanian  
David Bernon  
**Film Extracts**  
*Saturday Morning Mystery* (2012)  
*America's Parking Lot* (2012)

**Cast**  
**Guy Pearce**  
Trevor  
**Cobie Smulders**  
Kat  
Kevin Corrigan

Danny  
**Giovanni Ribisi**  
Paul  
**Anthony Michael Hall**  
Grigory  
**Brooklyn Decker**  
Erin  
**Constance Zimmer**  
Mandy

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope Entertainment

Austin, Texas, the present. Gym owner Trevor is planning to expand his business at a new, bigger location. New client Danny, an eccentric stoner who has recently inherited a large fortune, agrees to be his partner. However, the two men fall out over personal trainer Kat: Trevor once dated Kat and Danny has a crush on her. After Kat quits her job, she and Trevor acknowledge their mutual attraction and reconcile.

## Return to Sender

USA 2015  
Director: Fouad Mikati  
Certificate 18 95m 31s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Those who defend *Gone Girl* against charges of misogyny tend to argue that it's a satire on marriage, romcoms and/or the 'crazy bitches' slur. But does that supposed subversiveness hold up if 'Amazing Amy' is recast as someone who isn't so amazing, an overachiever whose psychotic machinations are actually utterly predictable? Fouad Mikati's *Return to Sender* – which began shooting the same year as *Gone Girl* and also stars Rosamund Pike – shares striking similarities with the Flynn/Fincher property, particularly in terms of plot, characterisation and lame fat jokes, repeating the same sins less stylishly.

Pike's Miranda is a wholesome daddy's girl with type-A tendencies, a doting geriatric nurse by day and decorator of Martha Stewart-esque cakes by night. (As if the precision involved in doing fancy tricks with icing wasn't enough to suggest her psychotic fussiness, she's also obsessed with a particular type of pen, ordering replacements in bulk shipments; early on in the film, she's sent into a rage at a dry cleaners when the one she has to hand runs out of ink.) Her co-workers don't understand why she's still single, and one of them sets her up on a blind date, begging her not to cancel this time. When a man shows up on her doorstep the day of the date, Miranda lets him into her home, and after some pretty standard romcom flirtatious banter, he violently rapes her. (Her real date discovers her, post-violation.)

This rape scene is easily among the most disturbing ever committed to film, not only because it's a complete reversal of everything that's come before, but also because of its length and level of graphic detail. That the most expert filmmaking occurs in this part of the story is also pretty discomfoting, and speaks volumes about how this sort of violence is just part of visual culture.

After this trauma, Miranda develops a tremor in her hand, which ruins both her chances of transferring to a different part of the hospital and her decorating hobby. As is to be expected, she also becomes more hostile, spitting out 'what I really think about you' rants. And because this is very clumsy misogyny, all these outbursts



Déjà vu: Rosamund Pike

are aimed at other women: she instructs the (actually quite fit) dry-cleaning attendant to "do everyone a favour and wear a bra" and to cover up her "fat stomach". She also begins a dual campaign of visiting her rapist in jail, slowly building his trust, and poisoning her father's big dog. Unsurprisingly, she applies what she learns from canicide to the rapist after his wildly unrealistic early parole, and, in a final act of crazy bitchiness, straps him to a bed in her basement, amputating one of his hands and his penis. (Of course, she pokes fun at the size of his member.)

Her behaviour – and the psychological tidbits she drops during this big climax – suggest it wasn't the rape that set her off: she was always nuts, allowing her asthmatic mother to die before her eyes. This low-rent Bond villain confrontation ("Let me explain my evil plans for you *and* get some exposition out of the way") is monotonous, and further narrows the already linear trajectory of the traditional female vengeance flick. Miranda's violence restores her equilibrium, but so what? In the hands of smarter writers, this scene could've been sharp and triumphant; here, it's just more evidence that a neurotic woman is worse than a rapist. **S**

## She's Funny That Way

USA/Germany 2014  
Director: Peter Bogdanovich  
Certificate 12A 93m 39s

### Reviewed by Samuel Wigley

There's an odd sensation of time frames phasing in and out of sync in Peter Bogdanovich's new film. This is not only because the narrative is told in flashback, with call-girl-turned-actor Izzy (Imogen Poots) explaining for a journalist the complicated anecdote of how her acting career took flight. It's also because, making his first theatrical feature since 2001's *The Cat's Meow*, the director has filmed a screenplay he wrote with his ex-wife Louise Stratten a decade ago – and one that bears as little relation to today as it did to 2005. Mobiles and MacBooks play their part in *She's Funny That Way*, but they're contemporary window dressing for another of Bogdanovich's séances with Hollywood's past.

Even more than Scorsese or Spielberg, Bogdanovich was the filmmaker of the 70s generation who seemed to have fallen hardest for classic Hollywood. Like his 1972 hit *What's Up, Doc?* (and several other of his films since), *She's Funny That Way* has got it bad for screwball comedies, or more precisely for the kind of proto-screwball comedies made by Ernst Lubitsch in the early 1930s – sophisticated romcoms with serpentine plots weaving together sex, coincidence and misunderstanding.

As so often in Lubitsch, much of the imbroiglio takes place in a swanky hotel. Married Broadway director Arnold (Owen Wilson) hires Izzy for the night, then gifts her \$30,000 to pursue her dream of becoming an actor. To his embarrassment, she turns up to audition for his new play, where his writer Joshua (Will Forte) promptly falls for her. The play's lead actor Seth (Rhys Ifans), meanwhile, is infatuated with his co-star Delta (Kathryn Hahn), Arnold's wife. Then there's Jennifer Aniston on deliciously abrasive form as Joshua's jilted shrink girlfriend, giving an inimitable brand of tough-love counselling to both Izzy and an ageing judge who's frantically fixated on the former prostitute.

It's a pickle that's faintly ludicrous yet often glitteringly entertaining as it plays out, even if we are never quite convinced that flesh-and-blood relationships or feelings are at stake. For all its lusting after Lubitsch (including a repeated direct quotation from the director's final film, 1946's *Cluny Brown*), *She's Funny That Way* feels closer – eerily so – to a late Woody Allen movie. There are the Irving Berlin standards on the soundtrack, the same well-heeled Manhattan locales, Owen Wilson repeating his flustered creative shtick from *Midnight in Paris* (2011), and echoes of *Mighty Aphrodite* (1995) in its carousel of entanglements around a kind-hearted hooker.

As with some late Allen too, there's a snow-globe airlessness – a detachment not just from the modern day but from a sense of real lives. Poots's appealing Bronx-accented heroine is the only character who's convincingly a person, but her references (Randolph Scott? Marlene Dietrich?) place her surreally out of time, a mouthpiece for the film's misty-eyed director.

Precious, hotel-based farces with two feet firmly in the cinematic past inevitably bring Wes Anderson to mind, and it was the backing of both Anderson and Noah Baumbach as executive producers that helped get this long-cherished Bogdanovich project off the ground. Another

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Candice Abela-Mikati  
Holly Wiersma  
**Written by**  
Patricia Beauchamp  
Joe Gossett  
**Director of Photography**  
Russell Carpenter  
**Edited by**  
Pete Beaudreau  
Thom Noble  
**Production Designer**  
Freddy Waff  
**Music**  
Daniel Hart  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Dick Hansen  
**Costume Designers**  
Kurt and Bart

**Production Companies**  
Voltage Pictures  
presents a Boo  
Pictures production  
in association with  
WOC Pictures and  
HW Productions  
**Executive Producers**  
Joe Gossett  
Logan Levy  
JC Khoury

**Cast**  
**Rosamund Pike**  
Miranda Wells  
**Shiloh Fernandez**  
William Finn  
**Camryn Manheim**  
Nancy  
**Illeana Douglas**  
Judy  
**Nick Nolte**

Mitchell Wells

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Arrow Films

Small-town US, the present. Miranda is a geriatric care nurse hoping to sell her house and transfer to surgery nursing. While eating out with her father, she saves a man from choking by performing an emergency tracheotomy. She is set up on a blind date by one of her co-workers. The afternoon of the date, William, a man who saw Miranda at the restaurant, comes to her house and rapes her. Following the incident, Miranda develops a tremor in her right hand, ruining her chances of transferring to surgery. Her estate agent informs her that nobody is interested in buying the house. Miranda writes several letters to William in jail, but they are returned. Finally, he responds and she begins visiting him. She gradually poisons her father's dog. When William is released on parole, Miranda asks him to help out with repairs to her house. Her father sees William working on the house and becomes angry; he refuses to speak to Miranda. One afternoon, Miranda poisons William and imprisons him in her basement, cutting off his hand and penis. She tells her father that she's better.



retro-minded current auteur turns up for a surprise cameo in the film's final moments, and there are blink-and-you'll-miss-them bit parts for Joanna Lumley and Michael Shannon – all of which cement the impression that there were a lot of Hollywood people who wished this new Bogdanovich picture into being. The film is a weightless anachronism, but as weightless anachronisms go, a far from unwelcome one. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Logan Levy  
Holly Wiersma  
Louise Stratton  
George Drakoulis

#### Written by

Louise Stratton  
Peter Bogdanovich

#### Director of

#### Photography

Yaron Orbach

#### Editors

Nick Moore  
Pax Wasserman

#### Production

#### Designer

Jane Musky

#### Music

Edward Shearmur

#### Sound Mixer

Damien Canelos

#### Costume Designer

Peggy Schnitzer

@Squirrels to

the Nuts, Inc.

#### Production

#### Companies

A Lagniappe Film

presentation

in association with

Venture Forth,

Three Point Capital,

Lallaps Pictures,

and Holly Wiersma

Productions

This production

participated in

the New York

State Governor's

Office for Motion

Picture & Television

Development's

Post Production

Credit Program

Executive

#### Producers

Wes Anderson  
Noah Baumbach  
Cassian Elwes  
Robert Ogden

#### Producers

Jacob Pechenik  
Andy Neuberger

Brice Sanderford

Najeeb Thomas

Charles Caplinger

Jeff Rice

Christa Campbell

Lati Grobman

Nils Dunker

Josef Steinberger

George Steiner

**Film Extracts**

*Cluny Brown* (1946)

**Cast**

**Owen Wilson**

Arnold Albertson

**Imogen Poots**

Isabella Patterson,

'Izzy'; 'Glowstick'

**Kathryn Hahn**

Delta Simmons

**Will Forte**

Joshua Fleet

**Rhys Ifans**

Seth Gilbert

**Lucy Punch**

Kandi

**Joanna Lumley**

Vivian Claremont

**Cybil Shepherd**

Nettie Finkelstein

**Illeana Douglas**

Judy

**Richard Lewis**

Al Finkelstein

**Austin Pendelton**

Judge Prendergast

**George Morfogen**

Harold Fleet

**Anna O'Reilly**

Elizabeth

**Jake Hoffman**

hotel bellman

**Tovah Feldshuh**

Miriam Prendergast

**Jennifer Aniston**

Jane Claremont

[uncredited]

**Quentin Tarantino**

himself

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

[1.66:1]

**Distributor**

Lionsgate UK

## Shooting for Socrates

United Kingdom/Ireland 2014

Director: James Erskine

Certificate PG 91m 15s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Strife-torn Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles offers a perfect context for an underdog story, since any ray of hope emerging from such a conflict seems that bit brighter. The survival of independent record shop Good Vibrations has already made one feel good celluloid charmer, and this blend of drama and documentary reconstruction essentially does the same for the Northern Ireland football team of the 1980s – a band of journeyman pros who somehow qualified for the World Cup in 1982 and 1986. Undoubtedly, their most remarkable achievement was beating the Spanish hosts in the first of those tournaments, but James Erskine's film understandably focuses on 1986's ultimate underdog encounter, when the smallest nation ever to qualify for the finals found itself up against the yellow-shirted gods of much fancied Brazil and its star player Socrates.

With John Hannah's high forehead making him a reasonable physical likeness for wily old-school manager Billy Bingham, a team of more-or-less lookalikes, and even staged recreations of the games themselves, the film takes its factual basis seriously, right down to an amiable supporting role for Conleth Hill as Jackie Fullerton, a quasi-legendary local character, best described as the Ron Burgundy of Ulster TV sports reporting. Enterprisingly, the script also highlights the role of 20-year-old Nottingham Forest midfielder David Campbell (Nico Mirallegro), whose Catholic family had moved to the Republic to evade the political tensions in the north, and who was to make his first start against the mighty Brazil – a game Bingham assesses as a "David and Goliath moment". Back in Belfast, however, one of the iconic cranes towering over the shipyards is actually nicknamed "Goliath", a pointed coincidence too good to miss, so a separate fictional thread features Richard Dormer's ineffably decent crane operator Arthur bringing up a football-



Myth-builder: John Hannah

mad son amid riots and British soldiers on east Belfast's terraced streets. The sum total is both a nostalgic portrait of a bygone era, when the international equivalent of a pub team graced the global stage, and a forgivably sentimental depiction of how Messrs McIlroy, Jennings and company brought a divided community together.

Given the production's evidently modest resources, that wave of communal togetherness has to be taken on trust, and elsewhere the film struggles to inject tension into the team's looming encounter with a higher footballing power. Neutrals may find it somewhat dramatically lightweight, but it gets the dressing-room banter spot-on. The sheer affection the film exudes for the halcyon days when young lads collected World Cup stickers and yearned for Subbuteo sets on their birthday, for a time when a boozy bunch of training-averse reprobates squared up to the world elite, is pretty much irresistible. Best of all, though, is Hannah's canny delivery of Bingham's heroically deluded team talks, never trying too hard for laughs as he extols the skewed logic that, since knowledge is power and the Brazilians know nothing about the NI XI, then Socrates's lot were the ones to be frightened. Priceless stuff. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producer

Victoria Gregory

#### Produced by

James Erskine

#### Original Screenplay

Marie Jones

James Erskine

#### Director of

#### Photography

Joel Devlin

#### Film Editor

Jason Savage

#### Production Designer

Ashleigh Jeffers

#### Original Score

Andrew Simon

McAllister

#### Sound Mixer

Marty Harrison

#### Costume Designer

Diana Ennis

@New Black Films

#### Production

#### Companies

Metro Film Sales

International and

Northern Ireland

Screen presents

in association

with 4Rights and

RTÉ a New Black

Films production

A James Erskine film

Made in association

with RTÉ

Developed with

the assistance

of Northern

Ireland Screen

With the partial

assistance of the

European Regional

Development Fund

through Northern

Ireland Screen

#### Executive Producer

Dominic Schreiber

#### Cast

**John Hannah**

Billy Bingham

**Conleth Hill**

Jackie Fullerton

**Richard Dormer**

Arthur

**Art Parkinson**

Tommy

**Ciarán McMenamin**

Sammy McIlroy

**Nico Mirallegro**

David Campbell

**Barry Ward**

Jimmy Quinn

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Part-subtitled

#### Distributor

Soda Pictures

Northern Ireland, 1985. As sectarian tensions flare up on the streets of Belfast, an unlikely away win in Bucharest puts the national football team on target to qualify for the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. Watching the team's progress are nine-year-old Belfast schoolboy Tommy, whose father Arthur operates one of the iconic cranes in the city's shipyard, and young Nottingham Forest player David Campbell, whose family has moved south to Letterkenny to evade the Troubles. A goalless draw with England at Wembley means that the unfancied Northern Ireland team managed by Billy Bingham reaches its second successive World Cup. Local TV journalist Jackie Fullerton and his cameraman travel with the team to a training camp in New Mexico, where the players successfully skirt the boss's alcohol ban, and thence south to Mexico, where a draw against Algeria and defeat by Spain leave Northern Ireland needing a virtual miracle against tournament favourites Brazil and their gifted star player Socrates. Campbell makes his debut in the Brazil game, which takes place on Tommy's tenth birthday, celebrated by his father showing him the view of the city from the top of the shipyard crane. Despite Bingham's confidence, Northern Ireland loses 3-0 to Brazil. Tommy cries at the team's tournament exit but his father offers consoling wisdom, knowing that the team's heroics have, for a moment at least, united a divided country.

## Slow West

United Kingdom/New Zealand/Australia 2015  
Director: John Maclean  
Certificate 15 83m 42s

See Industry,  
page 12

### Reviewed by Edward Buscombe

Without the bonds of organised society, Thomas Hobbes concluded, human life is nasty, brutish and short. This is the harsh lesson that trusting and naive Jay learns in the wilds of 19th-century Colorado, where, as his hard-bitten mentor Silas warns him, almost every time you turn over a stone, a desperado crawls out. Silas is another of the buttoned-up characters played by Michael Fassbender; his inner life is mostly opaque, but though he takes money for the lessons he imparts, the bond he forms with Kodi Smit-McPhee's Jay is genuine enough. The rapid and painful education of a youth by a man of mature experience is a returning motif in the western (think of *The Searchers* or *Ride the High Country*), and Silas's role as wet nurse to Jay is graphically expressed in a scene where he teaches the boy to shave. But unlike other westerns, where such an action might signify the passage from wilderness to civilisation, Jay's progress is in the opposite direction. Only at the end will savagery be left behind.

Death lurks around every corner of the trail; as if to remind us, the film concludes with a montage of all those who have been summarily despatched. The episodic structure of the narrative reflects Jay's experience, lurching from one unexpected encounter to the next, fear alternating with moments of incongruity and pathos – there's a peculiarly affecting scene, for example, in which we see two suddenly orphaned children whose desperate parents have just died in an incompetent hold-up. The gang of bounty hunters Jay meets on the trail are a collection of grotesques, one of them dressed as a priest. He also comes across a group of black men making music, and converses with them in French. Later, Jay and Silas find themselves in a wood where Native Americans have disguised themselves as trees; seemingly



Kodi Smit-McPhee, Michael Fassbender

out of nowhere, Jay receives an arrow in the hand, but the attackers' attempt to steal Jay and Silas's horses is thwarted in farcical manner.

It's an unglamorous view of the west, in ironic counterpoint to Jay's charming but dangerous innocence. The young man is slow to learn. Along the trail he encounters Werner, who, rather in the manner of the artist George Catlin, is documenting Native American culture before it disappears – none too soon, it appears, if we are to judge from the burnt-out settlement seen at the start of the film. The audience is less surprised than Jay to find that in the morning the benevolent ethnographer has disappeared with his horse. By contrast, Rose, the sweetheart Jay has followed out west, has adapted more readily, graduating from peasant dresses to a practical shirt and trousers, establishing a home and learning to shoot too. More poignantly, she has found another beau.

This is a highly promising debut from writer-director John Maclean. The New Zealand scenery passes tolerably well for Colorado, and the cast of largely British, American and Antipodean actors effectively represents the ethnic mix of the American west at the time. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Iain Canning  
Emilie Sherman  
Conor McCaughan  
Rachel Gardner  
**Written by**  
John Maclean  
**Director of Photography**  
Robbie Ryan  
**Film Editors**  
Roland Gallois  
Jon Gregory  
**Production Designer**  
Kim Sinclair  
**Composer**  
Jed Kurzel  
**Sound Recordists**  
New Zealand Unit:  
Richard Flynn  
Scotland Unit:  
Ivor Talbot  
**Costume Designer**  
Kirsty Cameron

Film4, BFI and the New Zealand Film Commission present in association with Cross City Films and Hanway Films a DMC Film/See-Saw Films/Rachel Gardner Films production Developed with the assistance of Film4, a division of Channel Four Television Corporation Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund, NZ Film Commission, Lottery Grants Board Financed in association with Fulcrum Media Finance, Cross/City  
**Executive Producers**  
Michael Fassbender  
Katherine Butler  
Zygi Kamasa

#### Cast

**Kodi Smit-McPhee**  
Jay Cavendish  
**Michael Fassbender**  
Silas Selleck  
**Ben Mendelsohn**

Payne  
**Caren Pistorius**  
Rose Ross  
**Rory McCann**  
John Ross  
**Andrew Robertt**  
Werner  
**Edwin Wright**  
Victor the Hawk  
**Kalani Queypo**  
Kotori

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.66:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

Scotland, 1870. Jay Cavendish, the teenage son of a nobleman, is in love with Rose, the daughter of a crofter. Jay's father is hostile to the relationship, calling Rose's people peasants; in an altercation, he is knocked down and killed by Rose's father, who runs off to the American west with his daughter. Jay follows.

Alone on the prairie, Jay is accosted by a band of men killing Native Americans, but he is rescued by Silas, a former bounty hunter. In return for payment, Silas offers to escort Jay through hostile country. Silas discovers that there is a bounty on the heads of Rose and her father, but only reveals this to Jay much later. Visiting an isolated general store, Silas and Jay become involved in a hold-up, which ends with two young children being orphaned: Jay wants to take them along but Silas refuses. Jay decides to part from Silas, but when he is robbed by an apparently benevolent ethnologist, Silas rescues him once more.

Rose and her father are now homesteading and, unbeknown to Jay, Rose has befriended a handsome Native American youth, Kotori. Along the trail Silas and Jay encounter a gang of bounty hunters with whom Silas once rode, and who hope that Jay will lead them to the runaway Scots. The gang lay siege to Rose's house, killing her father. Kotori sets fire to a field of corn, flushing out members of the gang for Rose to pick off, but he is himself killed. As Jay enters Rose's house, she shoots him in error. Silas is wounded but survives to set up house with Rose and the two orphaned children.

## Station to Station

USA 2015  
Director: Doug Aitken

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Setting-wise, this document of art happenings on a train in 2013 recalls both *Festival Express* (2003), Bob Smeaton's film on the Grateful Dead's 1970 train tour, and the accounts in *Ballets Russes* (2005) of Diaghilev's troupe chugging across America performing in backwaters. This is a much less raw and romantic affair; its musings on the rough beauty of train travel and the legacies of America's westward expansion come packaged like a high-end music video, with lots of slo-mo, lens flare and fancy lighting.

Multiple generations of American art and music aristocracy are represented – from Kenneth Anger through William Eggleston, Edward Ruscha, Jackson Browne and Patti Smith to Beck, Cat Power and Thurston Moore – alongside numerous other writers, performers, artists and architects. We see a great many sallow hipsters looking slack-jawed and mumbling about space and time; Moore sums up the overarching mood when he talks about songwriting being “completely experiential” and “resonant to the physical self” with the hollow ring of a man unaccustomed to being challenged on what he's actually talking about.

However, some of the performances and filmed ‘happenings’ have heart-pounding verve, and there are some unexpected and stirring moments among the interviews. “I'm extremely suspicious of normal people,” says writer Gary Indiana. “The only way that you can be normal in a society like this is to be complicit in things that are inhuman.” You do rather wish director Doug Aitken had taken his cue and allowed a bit more abnormality into this film, because for a “journey through modern creativity” it looks and feels awfully slick and corporate. Ⓢ



It happened ten nights: *Station to Station*

### Credits and Synopsis

**Created by**  
Doug Aitken  
**Produced by**  
Chris Totushek  
Alex Waite  
**Director of Photography**  
Doug Aitken  
Corey Walter  
**Editor**  
Austin Meredith  
**Sound Designer**  
Jon Huck

**Production Company**  
A Doug Aitken Workshop production  
**Executive Producers**  
Doug Aitken  
Arts & Sciences  
Marc Marrie  
Mal Ward

**voiceover by**  
Rick Prelinger

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

A documentary record of ‘Station to Station’, a nomadic art project curated by Doug Aitken. Over 24 days in 2013, a train makes its way from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, with artists and musicians working on board, and ten stops for ‘happenings’. Along the way, the creators involved discuss their art with Aitken.



## Survivor

USA/United Kingdom 2014  
Director: James McTeigue  
Certificate 12A 96m 32s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

There's something to be said for a thriller whose villain has undergone extensive plastic surgery to conceal his identity and come out the other side looking like Pierce Brosnan. It's as if he walked into the operating theatre, consulted a catalogue and said, "I'll have the James Bond, please" before hopping on the table. Such silliness is the order of the day in *Survivor*, which casts Milla Jovovich as an American foreign-service operative stationed in the UK who comes across a conspiracy to let unsavoury types pass unmolested through Heathrow en route to the US – a scheme that, naturally, goes all the way to the top of her department. After narrowly escaping a restaurant bombing that kills several of her unsuspecting colleagues, Jovovich's Kate Abbot is reduced to rodent duty in a citywide game of cat-and-mouse – with the major predator being Brosnan's mysterious mercenary assassin, who is known on the street as the Watchmaker.

The script, by first-time screenwriter Philip Shelby, is a morass of clichés, and director James McTeigue – the one-time Wachowski protégé who has since descended into second-tier fare such as *The Raven* – doesn't really attempt to mitigate this fact. Instead, *Survivor* is a film that makes no effort to conceal its assembly-line production, and whose creative principals from the star down appear to be either relieved or defeated by the lack of anything interesting to do. Jovovich's performances in the *Resident Evil* movies showed her to be a great physical actor and a good sport, but here she seems to be sleepwalking even when she's running through alleys and being flung around by her enemies, including law-enforcement officials convinced that she's the mastermind behind the whole evil plot. The only person who protests her innocence is a colleague played by Dylan McDermott, who manfully delivers his self-righteous dialogue straight up, with no smirking chaser.

That's good, because if anybody in *Survivor* betrayed any awareness of how ridiculous



Ticking bomb: Pierce Brosnan

the movie really is, it might crumble to pieces and leave them trapped in the rubble. This is a film in which people fly across the Atlantic and upload top-secret documents from their laptops using airline wi-fi in full view of their seatmates and stewardesses, and where one character's master-of-disguise bona fides are limited to a single fake moustache, trotted out on two separate occasions. What's not funny is the idea that McTeigue and Shelby intend this tale of terrorists thwarted by brave government agents as a commentary on actually existing global security issues. (News footage of 9/11 is shown when we're told that Kate lost most of her friends in the NYC attacks.) There's nothing out of bounds about action films trying to connect to the zeitgeist, of course, but *Survivor*'s attempts at resonance are as clumsy as they come. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Matt O'Toole  
Les Weldon  
Charles Winkler  
Irwin Winkler  
**Written by**  
Philip Shelby  
**Director of Photography**  
Danny Ruhlmann  
**Editor**  
Kate Baird  
**Production Designer**  
Max Gottlieb  
**Music**  
Ilan Eshkeri  
**Sound Mixer**  
Chris Munro  
**Costume Designer**  
Stephanie Collier  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Rowley Irlam

©Survivor  
Productions, Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
Nu Image presents  
a Millennium Films,  
Winkler Films

**production**  
A film by James  
McTeigue  
Produced with  
the assistance of  
Canada Film or  
Video Production  
Services Tax Credit,  
Ontario Production  
Services Tax Credit  
Co-financier:  
LipSync Productions,  
Norman Merry  
**Executive Producers**  
Avi Lerner  
Trevor Short  
Jason Bloom

**Cast**  
Milla Jovovich  
Kate Abbot  
Pierce Brosnan  
Nash  
Dylan McDermott  
Sam Parker  
Angela Bassett  
Maureen Crane  
Robert Forster  
Bill Bobot

**James D'Arcy**  
Paul Anderson  
**Frances de la Tour**  
Sally

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

London, the present. American passport-control specialist Kate Abbot briefs her team of young agents on the proper screening process, but her long-time boss Bill asks her to reduce the rigorosity of her procedures. On her way to dinner with her colleagues, Kate stops to buy Bill a present and thus escapes a bomb that has been set by a freelance assassin known as the Watchmaker – who, it transpires, has been hired by Bill to kill Kate. Kate confronts Bill, who accidentally shoots himself in the stomach; passers-by see the aftermath and assume that Kate killed him. Videos are uploaded to the internet framing her as the murderer. She goes on the run from the police. The police are also looking for the Watchmaker, who is involved in an ongoing terrorist plot. Kate and her superior Sam discover that Bill's son was kidnapped during a tour of duty in Afghanistan, and that a terrorist organisation has ordered him to trade visas for the young man's life. The Watchmaker critically injures Sam and continues to pursue Kate, who realises that the villains are planning to infect the crowds at New York's New Year's Eve celebrations with a lethal toxic gas. She flies to New York and catches the Watchmaker just as he is about to fire the shot that will explode the gas. They fight and the Watchmaker falls to his death.

## Tomorrowland A World Beyond

Director: Brad Bird, Certificate 12A 129m 52s

### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

The eponymous city of Brad Bird's *Tomorrowland* is an inventor's haven, located in an alternate dimension. Here, free from government or corporate intervention, the brightest minds of their time work diligently to make the world a better place. That is until one invention – a Pandora's Box of ill-will – threatens to bring the whole project, and life itself, to a halt, leaving an oddball gang of three, jaded inventor Frank (George Clooney), would-be astronaut Casey (Britt Robertson) and robot renegade Athena (Raffey Cassidy) to turn things around through a combination of tech-geekery and sunny outlooks. First, though, the ad-hoc family has to get there, fighting off android assassins as they race through time and space in a series of wacky contraptions, ranging from a flying bathtub to a clockwork rocket cunningly hidden in the base of the Eiffel Tower.

Inspired by Walt Disney's belief in technology as the key to both a better world and better entertainment as much by as the theme-park ride from which it takes its title, *Tomorrowland* swims against the tide of much contemporary cinema, which has an ambivalent attitude, to say the least, to artifice and artificial intelligence. In 'conceptual sci-fi' films such as *Her*, *Robot & Frank* and *Ex Machina*, our inventions have the potential to improve lives, sure, but audiences are cautioned against becoming dependent on them. In these films, as the critic as Jonathan Romney has noted, ideas take precedence over effects. The furor surrounding *Mad Max: Fury Road*'s eschewal of digital FX suggests a backlash against the overweening prevalence of green screens and motion capture in blockbusters too.

*Tomorrowland*'s production likewise demonstrates a preference for sets over screens: its fantastical location is in fact Santiago Calatrava's City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia, augmented with purpose-built sets. But its narrative – and its aesthetic – offers a retrograde celebration of the promise of science. It's no coincidence that the film opens with a flashback to the World's Fair of 1964, five years before man first set foot on the moon; nor that its vision of utopia seems to have sprung straight from *The Jetsons*; nor that for the most part we encounter this brave new world through the delighted eyes of children. Aided by effervescent cinematography from DP Claudio Miranda, Scott Chambliss's production design is wonderful in the most literal sense of the word, and as we first glimpse Tomorrowland alongside the young Frank (a brilliantly cast Thomas Robinson) and later Casey, adult viewers are plunged back into the cinematic marvels of their own youth, most overtly *The Wizard of Oz* but also *Back to the Future*, *Flight of the Navigator* and *E.T.*, among others.

Harking back to an earlier age of enchantment, these stylistic nods are a world away from the arch self-referentiality of the likes of *The Avengers*. Indeed, the film is at pains to distance itself from the cynical apocalypticism of such works, notably in the searing monologue in which arch-villain Hugh Laurie lays the blame for humanity's demise firmly at the hands of the "videogames, TV



Daydream believers: Britt Robertson, George Clooney

series, books and films" that repackage disaster for easy, apathetic consumption. The *Hunger Games* series, with its children forced into fast adulthood, springs to mind here. In contrast, *Tomorrowland's* young heroines Athena and Casey are brilliant brainy girls who remain just that, retaining their innocence even at the cost of a romantic foil for George Clooney. (That said, there's very little demonstration of Casey's brains – "She understands things" is about as far as we get.)

In form and theme, then, the film is Disney to its very core. *Tomorrowland's* concrete and glass curves call to mind Frank Gehry's LA

concert hall as well as Epcot's own architecture. That venue gets another nod through the recreation of its Small World ride at the World's Fair, while the two named locations – Florida and Paris – are the sites of two of Disney's other parks. Of course, the fact that *Tomorrowland* plays in this respect as a feature-length ad somewhat compromises its ostensible admixture of earnestness, proselytising and genuine progressiveness. And its closing call to arms for humanism and environmentalism is so saccharine as to stick in the craw. Still, it's a hard heart that would resist Clooney's appeal to his audience to just – for once – be amazed. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Damon Lindelof Brad Bird Jeffrey Chernov	<b>Director of Photography</b> Claudio Miranda	David Husby
<b>Screenplay</b> Damon Lindelof Brad Bird	<b>Editors</b> Walter Murch Craig Wood	<b>Costume Designer</b> Jeffrey Kurland
<b>Story</b> Damon Lindelof Brad Bird Jeff Jensen	<b>Production Designer</b> Scott Chambliss	<b>Production Companies</b> Disney presents a Brad Bird film
	<b>Music</b> Michael Giacchino	<b>Executive Producers</b> An A113 production
	<b>Production Sound Mixer</b> John Walker	<b>Executive Producers</b> Hugh Laurie
		<b>Production</b> David Nix
		<b>Sound Mixer</b> Bernard Bellew

Jeff Jensen  
Brigham Taylor

**Cast**  
**George Clooney**  
Frank Walker  
**Britt Robertson**  
Casey Newton  
**Hugh Laurie**  
David Nix  
**Raffey Cassidy**

Athena  
**Tim McGraw**  
Ed Newton  
**Kathryn Hahn**  
Ursula Gernsbach  
**Keegan-Michael Key**  
Hugo Gernsbach  
**Thomas Robinson**  
young Frank

**In Colour**  
[2.20:1]

**Distributor**  
Buena Vista  
International (UK)

In the present day, middle-aged Frank Walker and teen Casey Newton introduce themselves to the viewer and speculate on what the future might be like. Frank cues in a flashback to the 1964 World's Fair, where the pre-teen Frank's homemade jetpack captures the attention of the mysterious Athena. Giving him a badge with a letter T on it, she leads him through a portal to Tomorrowland, a futuristic utopia.

Casey now interrupts to narrate her encounter with Tomorrowland. After discovering a T badge, she has visions of this alternative world. While attempting to trace the badge's source she is attacked by robots and saved by Athena, also a robot, who takes her to the now adult Frank.

Frank explains that Tomorrowland is a real place, set up by the world's great minds and located in an alternative dimension, free of government or corporate intervention. While he was there, however, Frank invented something terrible, which led to his exile and

to Tomorrowland's demise. He and Casey are attacked by more robots but escape, and with Athena's help transport themselves to the Eiffel Tower – which is in fact a giant launchpad concealing a rocket that will return them to Tomorrowland. On arrival they are greeted by David Nix, the man responsible for Frank's banishment. Nix shows Casey Frank's invention: a machine that can show the future and has predicted Earth's imminent destruction. Casey's refusal to accept the prediction affects the odds of it coming true; she and Frank realise that there remains a possibility of saving the world if they can destroy his machine. Nix, who believes that the human race deserves to die, attempts to stop them but Athena, injured in the struggle, self-destructs, causing an explosion that destroys the machine.

One year later, Casey and Frank have rebuilt Tomorrowland. The video they are making is aimed at recruiting hopeful dreamers to help them create a brighter future.

## Two by Two

Germany/Luxembourg/Ireland/Belgium 2014

Director: Toby Genkel

Certificate U 86m 30s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

A Flood film that bypasses the Bible (and leaves Noah off screen), the multi-partner European co-production *Two by Two* uses the tale of Noah's Ark as the framework for an animated family adventure story. There are strong hints of *Madagascar* in its smart-talking all-animal escape narrative, and nods to the *Ice Age* series in its pre-schooler slapstick chases, mild menace and friendship themes. Consequently there's a formulaic feel to the proceedings. Toby Genkel, whose last outing was the forgettable *Thor: Legend of the Magical Hammer* (2011), co-directs with Sean McCormack; they use imaginative animal mutations and textures, and child-pleasingly lurid colours in the character design of the 'nestrians', furry hug-giving nomadic creatures that evolution forgot. But there's little here for anyone over eight, despite slick-enough English-language voice work and the odd videogame in-joke about Tetris. And even the kids might be uneasy about why a vast slug is crassly named 'Obesity'. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Co-directed by**  
Sean McCormack  
**Produced by**  
Emely Christians  
Moe Honan  
**Producer**  
Maite Woköck  
**Screenplay**  
Mark B. Hodkinson  
Richard Conroy  
Toby Genkel  
**Co-written by**  
Marteinn Thorissón  
**Editor**  
Reza Memari  
**Production Designer**  
Heiko Hentschel  
**Music**  
Stephen McKeon  
**Sound Design**  
Niall Brady  
Steve Fanagan  
**Animation Director**  
Peter Bohl

Fund Luxembourg, Screen Flanders, Enterprise Flanders, Flanders in Action, Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Tax Shelter of the Belgian Federal Government via SCOPE Invest, Government of Ireland, i2i Audiovisual Produced with the participation of Bord Scannán Na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board Supported by Studio Rakeite, Optical Art Digital & Film, Skyline Entertainment In collaboration with Global Screen, Senator Film Verleih, Telepool Developed with the support of Behörde für Wirtschaft und Arbeit der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg, Film Fund Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Bord Scannán Na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board  
**Executive Producers**  
Jean-Marie Musique  
Christine Parisse

Mark Mertens  
Jan Goossens  
Eric Wirix  
Jan Theys  
Geneviève Lemal  
Siún Ní Raghallaigh

### Voice Cast

**Dermot Magennis**  
Dave/Mr Griffin/  
prairie dog  
**Callum Maloney**  
Finny  
**Tara Flynn**  
Hazel  
**Ava Connolly**  
Leah  
**Paul Tylak**  
Obesity/Stayput/  
chimpanzee  
**Alan Stanford**  
lion  
**Aileen Mythen**  
Mrs Griffin/  
flamingo/Mrs  
Guard/Margaret  
**Patrick Fitzsymons**  
Tanglefoot/Mr  
Guard/Siberian tiger

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
E! Films

German  
theatrical title  
**Ooops! Die**  
**Arche ist weg**

@Ulysses Films, Fabrique d'Images, Moetion Films  
**Production Companies**  
Global Screen presents a Ulysses Films, Fabrique d'Images, Grid Animation, Moetion Films animated film Produced with the support of Film Fund Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein, German Federal Film Fund, FFA, Film

Ancient history, just before the Flood. Father and son Dave and Finny are nomad nestrians, a species left off the approved animal list for Noah's Ark. However, they get on board by pretending to be grymps; this angers grymp Hazel and her daughter Leah. Finny and Leah are accidentally swept away when the Flood comes. Dave and Hazel overcome their animosity and trick their way on to the bridge to turn the Ark around to find them. Finny and Leah flee griffon attacks; they meet giant slug Obesity and parasite Stayput. Working as a team, they all climb a mountain just ahead of the rising water. The Ark arrives just as the team are floating on floodwaters. Dave and Finny discover that they are aquatic mammals, rescue their friends and rejoin the Ark.



## Unfriended

USA/Russian Federation 2014  
Director: Leo Gabriadze  
Certificate 15 82m 35s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

The keynote horror-movie sequence of the digital age is surely the stringy-haired wraith wriggling free of the TV screen in Nakata Hideo's original *Ringu* (1998) – a slyly suggestive image of a ghost in the machine finding a way out. There's nothing nearly so resonant in the low-budget American supernatural thriller *Unfriended*, but that doesn't mean the film – directed by Russian-Georgian actor-turned-filmmaker Levan Gabriadze but more importantly bearing the imprimatur of *Paranormal Activity* producer Jason Blum – is negligible. What's compelling here is not the story, which finds five teenage friends being haunted by the spirit of a dead classmate. Rather, it's the presentation, which eschews the omnipresent found-footage format for something more radical: the entire film unfolds on the computer screen of one of the characters.

The gimmick isn't totally original: Spanish gore-meister Nacho Vigalondo got there first with *Open Windows* (2014), and there was also a nicely produced Canadian student short called *Noah* at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival. In all cases, the tension is between the self-contained physical space of the screen and the limitless visual and auditory possibilities inherent in activating different programs, files and web pages: *Unfriended* opens with a bit of Skyped sex-play between sweethearts Blaire (Shelly Hennig) and Mitch (Moses Jacob Storm), and while the video images imply that they only have eyes for each other, we're privy to Blaire's various distractions – checking her Facebook messages or clicking through a playlist. When their friends log in for a group chat, the screen becomes even more crowded with faces and avatars, and the number of sidelined text conversations increases accordingly; this is a film that's been expressly produced for a generation for whom multi-tasking is second nature.

The subtext of *Unfriended* is fairly obvious: the unchecked virtual intimacy between these kids belies all the analogue (ie physical) secrets they're keeping from each other. When the malevolent spirit of Laura Barns – the lonely girl glimpsed only posthumously in online



Living the scream: Shelley Hennig

videos, including the grossly voyeuristic party-night tableau that went viral and drove her to suicide – hacks into the group chat and writes cryptic, threatening messages, the passive-aggressive MO and stunted spelling are credible, even if the underlying notion of a poltergeist living inside the internet is patently silly.

For most of its running time, *Unfriended* is impressively pressurised, ruthlessly exploiting its audience's experience with the particular rhythms and rituals of online life – pop-up ads, pixelated video and that diabolical spinning beach ball that indicates a slow download – to achieve tension if not quite outright terror. Forget the embedded commentary on cyber-bullying, which is just a pretext for the old, reliable genre-movie spectacle of greedy, dishonest, sexually duplicitous kids getting what's coming to them. What's finally frightening about *Unfriended* is how sharply it conveys the sensation of being trapped inside one's MacBook – a new-fangled and subliminally familiar kind of claustrophobia of which this surprisingly clever film is both a symptom and a critique. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Timur Bekmambetov  
Nelson Greaves  
**Written by**  
Nelson Greaves  
**Director of Photography**  
Adam Sidman  
**Edited by**

Parker Laramie  
Andrew Wesman  
**Production Designer**  
Heidi Kolesito  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Clint Alliday  
**Costume Designer**  
Veronika Belenikina

©Universal Studios  
**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures and Blumhouse present a Bazelevs production  
**Executive Producer**  
Jason Blum

**Cast**  
Shelley Hennig  
Blaire  
Moses Storm  
Mitch  
Renee Olstead  
Jess  
Will Peltz  
Adam

Jacob Wysocki  
Ken  
Courtney Halverson  
Val  
Heather Sossaman  
Laura Barns

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures International  
UK & Eire

## Unhallowed Ground

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Russell England  
Certificate 15 96m 56s

### Reviewed by Sophia Satchell Baeza

For children of the 90s who grew up with the luridly tinted *Point Horror* teen-fiction paperback series, this British supernatural thriller will be comfortably familiar. Where *Point Horror* projected teen growing pains on to high-school psycho-killers and stalked babysitters, *Unhallowed Ground* is updated for a generation accustomed to hashtag dialogue and *Skins*. Nevertheless, Russell England's debut feature feels unsure of its identity, situating itself rather awkwardly between the heist and horror genres, without ever satisfactorily linking them.

A muddled script set in a public school offers little meaningful association between present-day supernatural happenings and the murders of scholars during the Great Plague. The audience is left uncertain whether danger stems from the bubonic plague, the British class system or a gaggle of demonic apparitions. The sixth-former characters are frustratingly one-dimensional and almost entirely unconvincing – the girls seem happiest talking about Ryan Gosling or shrieking in the wings when violent action ensues. The film's numerous jumps fall flat, and scares are neutered by meagre special effects and badly executed makeup.

Things start to look up when the students stumble on a satanic ritual: having failed to get into Oxford, one of the characters rejects his upper-class privilege to embrace the devil and ultimate damnation. It's not the eruption of class war one might hope for, but it does provide a momentary burst of energy in an otherwise flagging enterprise. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Neville Raschid  
**Written by**  
Paul Raschid  
**Director of Photography**  
Glenn Warrillow  
**Film Editor**  
Simon Greenwood  
**Original Music and Score**  
Xiaotian-Shi  
**Production Sound Design**  
Wayne Reay  
**Costume Design**  
Mark Foster

©Aviary Films Ltd  
**Production Companies**  
An Aviary Films production  
**Executive Producers**  
Keith Hayley

John C Patton  
Arun Raman  
Danesh Varma

**Cast**  
Ameet Chana  
Jazz  
Poppy Drayton  
Verity Wickes  
Marcus Griffiths  
Aki Adebola  
Thomas Law  
Daniel Gordon  
Andrew Lewis  
Dr Carmichael  
Morgane Polanski  
Sophie Dunant  
Rachel Petladwala  
Meena Shah  
Paul Raschid  
Rishi Patel  
Will Thorp  
Shane

**In Colour**

[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Aviary Films

US, the present. A year after teenager Laura Barns killed herself, her friend Blaire is surfing the internet looking at articles about the incident. These reveal that Laura was driven to suicide by cyber-bullying after a video showing her passed out drunk at a party went viral. Blaire is interrupted by a Skype call from her boyfriend Mitch, who tries to get her to take off her clothes on her webcam. She tells him that they should have sex for the first time at prom, at which point three of their friends – Jess, Adam and Ken – log in for a group chat. The friends are joined by a sixth person with a mysterious blank avatar who eventually identifies herself as Laura's ghost. The

friends argue about whether or not this is a prank, but after calling up another girl, Val, who's known for cyber-bullying, they realise that Laura's spirit is haunting them and capable of controlling both their online interface and their physical actions if they defy her orders. One by one, the teenagers are killed, mostly by Laura making them do violent things to themselves; she also forces them to confess their worst secrets, including the fact that Blaire and Adam slept together behind Mitch's back. Eventually only Blaire is left. She types out a frantic apology. We see that the video of Laura was filmed by Blaire. Laura's ghost appears in Laura's room and kills her.

UK, present day. A group of sixth-formers begin army cadet training at Dhoultham School. Patrolling the grounds at night, the teenagers witness a series of supernatural incidents. One of them, Rishi, leads a search to investigate a series of murders carried out during the Great Plague, when four scholars were found dead after apparent satanic rituals. Meanwhile two masked thieves are stealing the valuable school archive. A conflict ensues, in which the cadets attempt to escape from both the burglars and their supernatural tormentors.

## West

Germany 2013

Director: Christian Schwochow

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

It's often been remarked that, when it came to setting up an all-seeing surveillance society, the Germans proved far more efficient at it than the Russians. In East Germany, the Stasi left the KGB standing; it's been estimated that 12-15 per cent of the population may have been Stasi informants. We've seen this chillingly paranoid state depicted in films such as *The Lives of Others* (2006). What's been rather less frequently noted, on film or anywhere else, is how over the 44 years that Germany was split down the middle, the pervasive paranoia on the east of the divide created its mirror image on the western side, poisoning both societies. It's this malign symbiosis that Christian Schwochow's film vividly conjures up.

Based on Julia Franck's 2003 novel *Lagerfeuer* (literally, 'campfire') and scripted by Schwochow's mother Heide, *West* repeatedly plays up the parallels between the two regimes, supposedly so different. When Nelly Senff (Jödis Triebel) quits the GDR with her young son Alexei, the border guards force her to submit to a humiliating strip-search before they'll allow her through to West Berlin. And there, in order to be accepted for citizenship, she has to strip again, more than once. "Hmm, no creepy-crawlies," comments the woman doctor examining her, as if anyone coming from the east can be assumed to have lice. And when, after days of interrogation by a West German security official and his CIA colleague, Nelly is asked for the umpteenth time why she wanted to leave East Germany, she snaps, "Because of questions like these!"

Given the squalid refugee camp where Nelly and Alexei are obliged to live, with its hostile glances, unappetising food and nights constantly disturbed by drunken shouting from along the corridor, it's not surprising that Alexei complains, "I want to go back home!" Some do just that, leaving the supposed consumer paradise to head back behind the Iron Curtain: towards the end of the film Krystyna, the young Polish woman who befriends Nelly in the camp, boards a coach with her senile father to return to Poland.

More damaging than the camp conditions, though, are the suspicions that are sown in Nelly's mind. Repeatedly she asserts that she left the GDR because she "wanted to forget", but that's the last thing she's allowed to do. John Bird (Jacky Ido), the CIA agent who interrogates her and eventually beds her, persistently reminds her about Vassily, her supposedly dead Russian lover who was a high-powered physicist, speculating that his death may have been faked, and warning that Stasi agents may be keeping an eye on her on Vassily's account.

These insidious ideas poison Nelly's relationship with Hans (Alexander Scheer), the reclusive camp inmate who's evidently drawn to her and Alexei, and by extension they also damage her relationship with her son, since he has taken to Hans – he even gives him the fluffy white sweater that's his sole memento of Vassily, his dad. When Hans is brutally beaten up by other East German refugees, it's as though Nelly's suspicions have infected the entire camp, and Alexei's grief-stricken comment as they survey Hans's battered body ("This is how I imagined Dad



World without pity: Jödis Triebel

in his coffin") only compounds her sense of guilt.

The final scene hints at the possibility of reconciliation. It's a strength of the film, though, that Schwochow avoids easy closure and ready answers. Vassily may still be alive somewhere, Hans may really be a Stasi agent – we, along with Nelly, are left guessing. Uncertainty and insecurity are built into the system on both sides of the Curtain. There's a major autobiographical element to *West* both Julia Franck and Schwochow himself were born in East Germany and moved to the

west at about the same age as Alexei, and their experiences – and those of their families – lend a telling sense of emotional authenticity.

Triebel eloquently reflects Nelly's emotional shifts in her face and eyes, now open and playful (we often see her and Alexei scuffling together like two kids), now closed and resentful, almost sulky, as suspicion starts eating away at her. Her performance, awarded Best Actress prize at Montreal, embodies in itself the lasting trauma that Germany, whether divided or uneasily reunited, has yet to recover from. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Katrín Schlösser  
Thomas Kufus  
Christoph Friedel  
**Screenplay**  
Heide Schwochow  
Based on the novel *Lagerfeuer*  
by Julia Franck  
**Director of Photography**  
Frank Lamm  
**Editor**  
Jens Klüber  
**Production Designer**  
Tim Pannen  
**Music**  
Lorenz Dangel  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Jörg Kidrowski  
**Costume Designer**  
Kristin Schuster

©Zero One Film,  
Terz Film, Ö-Film  
**Production Companies**  
Zero One Film,  
Terz Film, Ö-Film  
in co-production  
with Senator  
Film Produktion,  
Westdeutscher  
Rundfunk,  
Südwestrundfunk,  
Rudolfk Berlin-

Brandenburg, ARTE  
Supported by Film-  
und Medienstiftung  
NRW, Medienbörse  
Berlin-Brandenburg,  
Filmförderung-  
sanstalt, Deutscher  
FilmFörderfonds  
Development  
supported by  
MEDIA and DEFA

#### Cast

Jödis Triebel  
Nelly Senff  
Tristan Göbel  
Alexei  
Jacky Ido  
John Bird  
Anja Antonowicz  
Krystyna  
Ryszard Ronczewski  
Krystyna's father  
Andreas Nickl  
Gerd Becker  
Polina  
Voskresenskaya  
Jelena  
Alexander Scheer  
Hans Pischke  
Julia Franck  
French secret  
service agent  
Tom Zahner  
Fleischmann

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
New Wave Films

German  
theatrical title  
**Westen**

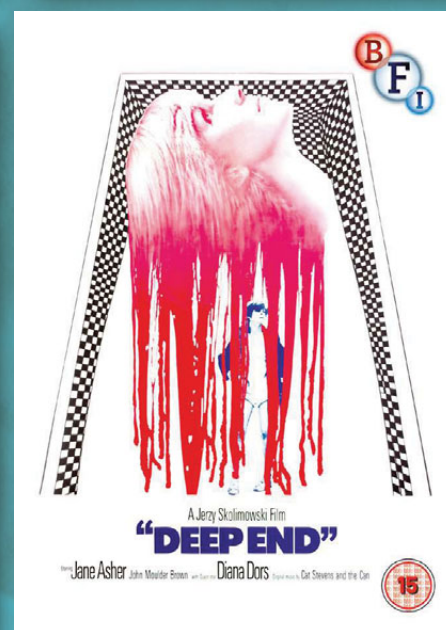
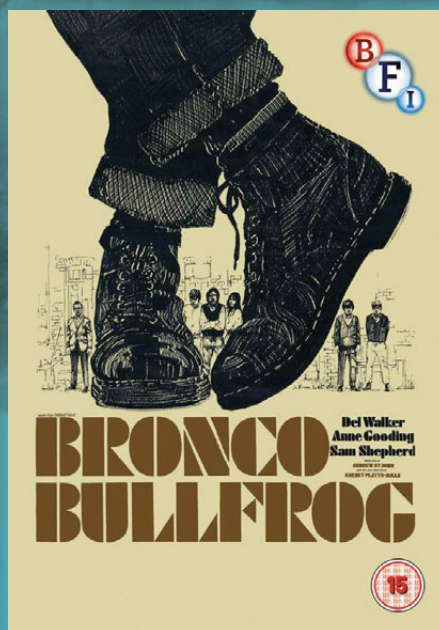
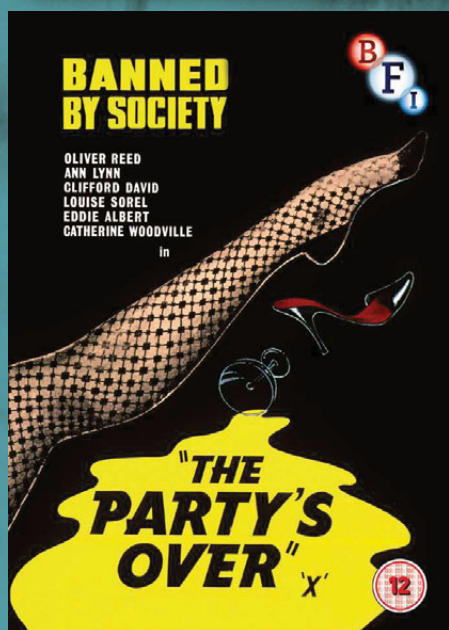
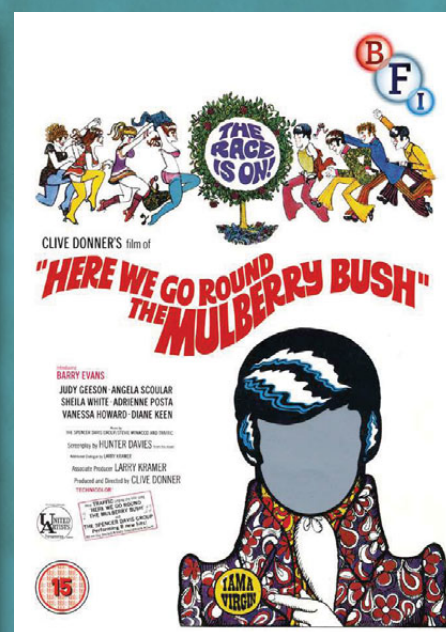
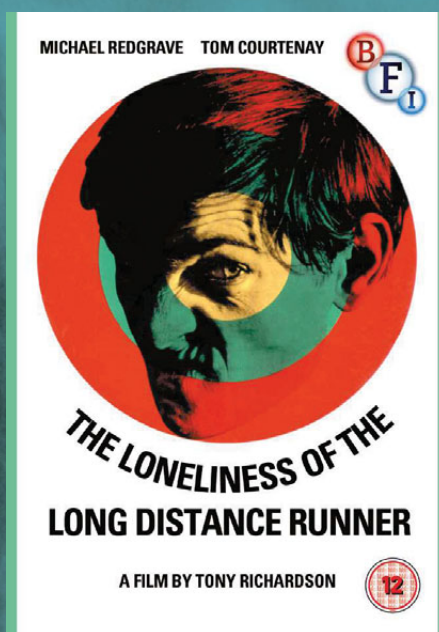
**East Berlin, 1978.** Nelly Senff, a chemist in her early thirties, gains permission to leave the GDR for the west with her nine-year-old son Alexei. Alexei's father Vassily, a Russian physicist, reportedly died three years earlier in a car accident in Moscow. The GDR border guards humiliate Nelly by strip-searching her, but let her and Alexei leave.

Nelly finds lodgings in a refugee centre in West Berlin, and makes friends with her Polish neighbour Krystyna. Unable to get a job until she is accepted as a West German citizen, Nelly is subjected to medical examinations, followed by days of interrogation by secret service agent Fleischmann and his CIA counterpart John Bird. Bird suggests that Vassily's death may have been faked by the Soviets. At the refugee centre, a fellow East German, Hans Pischke, befriends Alexei. Bird meets Nelly in a café; they go to a hotel and have sex. Bird hints that Vassily may have been working for the west and is now in hiding; he warns Nelly to beware of Stasi agents. She starts to suspect Hans and tells Alexei to keep away from him, but when street kids break Alexei's glasses he goes to Hans for help. Hans tells Nelly that he was jailed by the Stasi for two years, but she still mistrusts him. Rumours about Hans circulate in the centre, and he's badly beaten up by some of the other East German refugees; Nelly and Alexei take him to hospital. Nelly realises that her suspicions may be unfounded. She gets a job and she and Alexei move into a flat. On Christmas Day, Hans comes to the flat and Alexei lets him in.





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# Home cinema



Because he's a Londoner: Bob Hoskins and Cathy Tyson in *Mona Lisa*

## TO HIS MANOR BORN

Bob Hoskins gives standout performances in two films that capture the mood of Thatcher-era London with vivid authenticity

### THE LONG GOOD FRIDAY/ MONA LISA

John Mackenzie/Neil Jordan; UK 1980/86; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 105/100 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: commentaries, interviews, documentary, alternative audio versions, safety short, trailers, booklet

#### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

There was always an appealing innocence to Bob Hoskins, even when he was acting thuggish – and there's no shortage of thuggish in *The Long Good Friday*. This was the film that won him big-screen fame, after he'd made his mark on TV as the lead in Dennis Potter's *Pennies from Heaven* (1978), and much of its comedy and pathos derives from the inability of his cockney crime boss Harold Shand to comprehend what it is he's up against. Proud of what he sees as his role as a forward-looking entrepreneur, wholly in tune with Thatcher's thrusting Britain, he's

still fatally blinkered by the East End criminal code he grew up with; so he imagines that rubbing out a couple of senior IRA men will be enough to get the organisation off his back, as if they were just another rival gang. Only at the very end, in the back of a car, gazing down the muzzle of a gun held by a sardonically grinning Irishman (Pierce Brosnan, making his cinematic debut), does enlightenment slowly dawn. By which time, of course, it's way too late.

That long final near-unbroken close-up on Hoskins's face as emotions chase across his features – fury, incomprehension, realisation, regret, resignation – made clear, if anyone had doubted it, how skilled he was as an actor. Six years later – and with *The Honorary Consul* (1983), *The Cotton Club* (1984) and *Brazil* (1985) under his belt – *Mona Lisa* clinched it. This time, pathos was to the fore, with Hoskins as the naive ex-con fresh out of jail and falling for the “tall thin black tart” (Cathy Tyson) he's been assigned to chauffeur around to her clients. Here, as in *Friday*, he had the benefit of a strong female role to play against: Tyson, tough, wounded and quivering with suppressed venom, gives what should surely have been a career-making performance; and in the earlier film Helen Mirren as Harold's

mistress, easily outpacing her man in intelligence and *savoir faire*, lends the role incisive wit.

Suffused though it is with Neil Jordan's wistful romanticism, *Mona Lisa* also has humour, often sparked by the woeful lack of social skills displayed by Hoskins's character George. Given money by Simone (Tyson) to “buy some decent clothes”, he shows up the next day proudly sporting a bomber jacket the colour of peanut butter and a garishly flowered shirt. These elements and some offbeat surrealist touches – George, heading off to see Mortwell (Michael Caine), the master criminal for whom he did time, pauses to buy him a floppy-eared white rabbit – lift the film some way out of genre. Jordan, in the interview on this Arrow disc, calls it “a thriller that refuses to be a thriller”.

*Friday* is closer to a straight thriller, though by no means routine genre fodder. Besides Hoskins's and Mirren's standout performances, John


*Hoskins's cockney crime boss Harold Shand sees his role as an entrepreneur, in tune with Thatcher's thrusting Britain*



Mackenzie's high-octane direction and Francis Monkman's motoric, mockingly jaunty synth score, the film creates a grittily evocative portrait of London teetering on the brink of change, deftly sideswiping all the cockney-criminal clichés as the borderline between legit business and the underworld is eroded. (The Big Bang, freeing up banks to act like Vegas high-rollers, was only a year or two in the future.) When Harold, strutting like a mix of Napoleon and the Kray brothers, gives a grandstanding speech to his assembled accomplices and investors as his flashy yacht heads downstream under Tower Bridge and past the lucrative real estate of Canary Wharf, Barrie Keeffe's sharp scripting hits its high point. (The abattoir scene runs it close, though, with Harold's gangland rivals dangling upside down from meat hooks.) Lew Grade's ITC was so horrified at what it had bankrolled that it proposed to emasculate the film, slash it by half and release it on TV. Luckily, George Harrison's Handmade Films stepped in, buying the production for £850,000 and releasing it to rave reviews.

*Mona Lisa* too makes vivid use of its London locations, though often to more expressionist effect: the scuzzy King's Cross road bridge (filmed at Paddington) where the underage nightwalkers ply their trade is shot and colour-suffused like the gateway to hell. (Jordan apparently cast real prostitutes as extras for these scenes.) Mischievously obscure references salt the script – written by David Leland, radically rewritten by Jordan – not least John Franklin Bardin's cult surreal crime novel *The Deadly Percheron*, presented as a favourite of George's junkshop-owner friend Thomas (Robbie Coltrane), while Nat King Cole's classic rendition of the title song haunts the film with its aching melancholy ("Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep/They just lie there, and they die there").

So intrinsic to the mood of the film is Hoskins's touchingly credulous, vulnerable George that it's hard to credit the role was originally offered to Sean Connery. As the chillingly ruthless Mortwell, Caine delivers maximum impact through minimal screen time to a degree rarely achieved since Orson Welles in *The Third Man*.

Arrow's scrupulous 2K restorations provide a visual, and aural, treat. Extras offer rich pickings, especially the *Friday* discs. *Bloody Business* is far more substantial than the usual making-of, not least for Mirren's recollections of her battle to turn her role into something feistier and more intelligent than bog-standard gun moll. Brief, diverting doc *Hands Across the Ocean* recounts transatlantic attempts to have Hoskins's throaty cockney in *Friday* revoiced by "someone from Wolverhampton" (Hoskins threatened to sue); but problem words such as 'nosh', 'geezer' and 'bollocks' were replaced. Mackenzie's 30-minute COI health-and-safety film *Apaches* must have scared the pants off several generations of farm kids. 

**The Long Good Friday** is rereleased to UK cinemas by Park Circus on 19 June, and plays as part of the 'London on Film' season at BFI Southbank, London, which runs from July-September

## New releases

### BEYOND THE LIGHTS

Gina Prince-Bythewood; USA 2014; Universal Pictures/Region 2 DVD; 1.85:1; 110 minutes; Features: audio commentary, deleted scenes

#### Reviewed by Ashley Clark

Five years in the making, Gina Prince-Bythewood's absorbing drama tracks the developing relationship between troubled London-to-LA pop/R&B star Noni (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) and her doting security detail Kaz (Nate Parker) in the aftermath of his successful attempt to talk her down from a ledge.

*Beyond the Lights* is most successful in its quieter, tactile moments, when Prince-Bythewood's camera lingers on the lovers as they get to know each other. As the director demonstrated in her excellent debut *Love & Basketball* (2000), she's an expert at extracting naturalistic performances and keying into the irregular rhythms of a putative romance.

The film runs into trouble in its later stages, with Noni's search for folkie 'authenticity' failing to convince; conversely, the portrayal of the salacious contemporary pop industry, including a fine, snarling turn from white rapper Machine Gun Kelly, is bang-on. A subplot involving Kaz's political ambitions is uninteresting, while Danny Glover is woefully underused as Kaz's father. I was also irked by the film's casual misrepresentation of South London district Brixton as a lock-up-your-daughters danger zone, instead of the hyper-gentrified mecca for estate agents and artisanal bakers it's really become. "It's crazy in Brixton now," one character exclaims, absurdly. "They carry guns like mobile phones!"

Yet these are relatively small quibbles. It's a crying shame – and indicative of a wider reluctance on the part of studios to support films focused on black romance – to see a work so accessible and well crafted being shunted straight to DVD in the UK. It's an old-fashioned date movie in the vein of *The Bodyguard* (1992) given a modern pop spin, and in a just world it would be playing to sizeable Saturday-night multiplex crowds.

**Disc:** Audio commentary and deleted scenes.



Paws for thought: Nastassja Kinski in *Cat People*

### CAT PEOPLE

Paul Schrader; USA 1982; Mediumrare/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 118 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: new interviews with cast and Paul Schrader, director's commentary, making-of documentaries

#### Reviewed by Charlie Fox

According to Hollywood legend, throughout the shooting of *Cat People* Paul Schrader was seeing two different psychiatrists. This sounds wickedly apt because the film is a tale straight from the unconscious, about split selves and forbidden desires, yet it also finds a disorientating cinematic chemistry between two forms by combining eroticism and horror.

A somnambulistic Nastassja Kinski (then a major sex symbol – a description to bear in mind while watching this Jungian dream-scenario unfold) stars as Irena, a virginal innocent summoned by her brother (Malcolm McDowell on marvellously sly form) to New Orleans. He soon inducts her into a malign family tradition involving incest, magic and transformation into a panther.

*Cat People* has the reputation of a failure but it's actually a risky experiment. The mysterious atmosphere is powered by hazy subtextual clues and riddles. Schrader gives us an ominously subdued New Orleans, exploring it at a slow-motion pace through deep shadow and shivering moonlight. He has lurid fun with all the hints, feints and gore expected of a knowing genre game, but also attempts to channel the uncanny languor of Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) into its contents.

Supposedly a remake of Jacques Tourneur's 1942 original, the film soon vanishes into the dark territory of Schrader's obsessions – a typically anguished reflection on violence, metamorphosis and voyeurism lurks beneath its monstrous fur and claws. Other than *Mishima*, this is the most delirious work to his name and it rumbles with malevolence.

**Disc:** Vivid restoration, great archival extras.

### CHARLIE CHAPLIN: THE MUTUAL COMEDIES

THE FLOORWALKER/THE FIREMAN/  
THE VAGABOND/ONE A.M./THE COUNT/  
THE PAWNSHOP/BEHIND THE SCREEN/  
THE RINK/EASY STREET/THE CURE/  
THE IMMIGRANT/THE ADVENTURER

Charlie Chaplin; USA 1916-17; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 305 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: Carl Davis orchestral scores plus various alternative scores, commentaries by Frank Scheide, Glenn Mitchell, Dan Kamin, Hooman Mehran, Bryony Dixon, Michael Hayde and Carl Davis, 'Chaplin Signs the Mutual Contract' (1916, 25 seconds), 'Charlie on the Ocean' (1921, five minutes), Carl Davis interview, 36-page booklet

#### Reviewed by Robert Hanks

It's hard to complain that Charlie Chaplin is neglected, given the existence of a minor industry in academic Chaplin studies and editions of his work as lavish and attentive as this one; but there are always people who regard not finding Chaplin funny as a badge of honour (as though it is hard to laugh at Buster Keaton). Poor prints haven't helped: he's



# New releases

◀ subtler than people allow, and a dark, badly cropped version makes it hard to follow a good percentage of the jokes. This set should help the cause: the dozen films Chaplin made for Mutual's Lone Star Film Company – on a contract that made him the world's highest-paid entertainer – saw him developing a modern style from quasi-Victorian roots.

Early on, in *The Vagabond*, sentimentality and a melodramatic 'stolen by gypsies' plot coexist awkwardly with slapstick; the extended series of drunk gags that constitutes *One A.M.* is pure music hall. But by the end of the Mutual contract, in films such as *Easy Street* (Charlie as policeman) and *The Adventurer* (Charlie as escaped convict), gags and romance were integrated, and the pathos of the poor-little-tramp situation was broadening into social commentary: it's not a strain to find hints of the class-consciousness that got him into trouble with the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Groucho is the Marx he really makes you think of, though: *The Floorwalker* has early versions of the mirror gag from *Duck Soup* and the plot of *The Big Store*. Elsewhere, *One A.M.*'s sketch of an inanimate world in passive-aggressive revolt against humanity prophesies Beckett (who originally wanted Chaplin, not Keaton, for *Film*; and cf the novella 'The Expelled', whose narrator has Chaplin's walk and difficulties with staircases).

**Disc:** The improvement over the BFI's 2005 DVD release cannot be overstated, with subtler grades of dark and light revealing far more detail, and some of the films running up to three minutes longer. The option to change the music is very welcome – I'm a big Carl Davis fan, but drama, not comedy or sentiment, is his forte, and his orchestral scores (the default option here) are often overblown next to the piano improvisations and smaller ensembles offered as alternatives. The commentaries vary in quality but offer a lot of helpful context. The booklet essays are terrific, particularly Dan Kamin's analysis of Chaplin's balletic physical comedy.

## FORTY GUNS

Samuel Fuller; USA 1957; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 80 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: audio interview with Samuel Fuller at National Film Theatre in 1969, video interview with Jean-Louis Leutrat

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Sam Fuller, who started as a tabloid journalist, knew the power of a grab-'em opener – hence cattle baroness Barbara Stanwyck's galloping posse of '40 guns' breaking like a vast, warning wave around the hero's wagon at the start of this iconoclastic, emotion-driven western. It's simultaneously a recognisable genre piece (it shares several key elements with 1956's *The Maverick Queen*) and a groundbreaker, its *noirish* looks and melodramatic plot giving it an exhilaratingly uneven feel.

Fuller, who admitted happily that the film was 'stuffed with phalluses', soaks the dialogue in barely disguised sex – for example, Stanwyck's famous demand to feel gunslinger Barry Sullivan's 'trademark' piece. The film is wry and world-weary where its close western



Beside the seaside: *French Dressing*

cousin *Johnny Guitar* (1954) is bitterly intense, the central middle-aged love affair heightened by its last-chance feel. Birthed by a howling CinemaScope tornado and halted by a startling bullet, it feeds off Sullivan's laconic amusement at Stanwyck's tough-talking, high-riding energy. His fine underplaying, as the late Jean-Louis Leutrat observes in a meticulous filmed overview, skilfully internalises the violence that explodes in the brutal surprise climax.

Like everything in this contrarian piece, guns are both despised and fetishised (that gun-barrel view of a sweetheart, a killer's bullet as personal as a fingerprint). Yet violence has an unusual close-up ugliness here, with a marshal gunned down while struggling like a beetle on his back and froth gurgling from a dying villain's mouth. This, and the novel comic-book cutting from Sullivan's steady tread to a giant close-up gaze in his first gunfight, imprinted on everyone from the *Cahiers* crowd to Sergio Leone. But it's the tense, protracted undertaker's alley ambush that sideswipes you, Sullivan's stony face conveying for the first time the ambivalence of winning and losing with a single bullet.

**Disc:** A fine-detailed transfer that shows off Joseph Biroc's superb monochrome cinematography, with its gangsterish shadows and palls of dust. A crisp soundtrack buffs both Fuller's predilection for ominous hoofbeats and Jidge Carroll's celebratory anthem 'High-Ridin' Woman'. If the decision to run Fuller's 1969 NFT interview in the commentary track makes for a curious combination, Leutrat's careful, historical reading of the film more than compensates.

## FRENCH DRESSING

Ken Russell; UK 1964; Network/Region 2 DVD; 83 minutes; Certificate PG; 2.35:1; Features: theatrical trailer, photo gallery

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The first of Ken Russell's theatrical features is the last to make it to DVD, which says something about the reputation of this British seaside frolic, which even its own maker dismissed. Russell was making waves with his often rhapsodic work for the BBC's arts strand *Monitor*, including the 1962 milestone *Elgar*, when he took on this rather lighter assignment from the writers and producer of several successful Cliff Richard musicals. No room for Cliff or indeed The Shadows in this skit about a deckchair attendant

and bumbling council functionary (*Zulu*-co-star James Booth and rotund comic stalwart Roy Kinnear) trying to inject life into comatose Gormleigh-on-Sea by luring sub-Bardot screen siren Françoise (charmless bombshell Marisa Mell) across the Channel for a publicity-raking festival of her flesh-baring 'artistic' films.

Sounds like a right *Carry On*, but Russell's approach is certainly distinctive, taking its cue from Georges Delerue's alternately carnivalesque and bittersweet score to generate a Tati-esque blend of knockabout and wistfulness. Trouble is, the material compounds clunky dialogue with lumpen satire, while the performers lack the necessary finesse, so Russell's *nouvelle vague*-inspired flourishes, wrestling a surreal image or a lyrical moment from out of thin air, only go so far. Still, as well as from providing a charming record of the historic pier at Herne Bay (since destroyed by fire), this is a valuable glimpse of a filmmaker who brought boundless imagination and energy to hidebound British cinema – even if the industry at this juncture wasn't quite ready for him.

**Disc:** A respectable transfer of a clean print.

## HESTER STREET

Joan Micklin Silver; USA 1975; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray; 90 minutes; 1.78:1

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Hester Street*, the bittersweet 1975 debut feature by Joan Micklin Silver (*Chilly Scenes of Winter*, *Crossing Delancey*), takes place in New York City in the 1890s, though its title betrays the parochial nature of its characters' lives. By the time that Gitl (Carol Kane), a Jewish immigrant from the shtetls of Eastern Europe, has been in her new country long enough to start learning English, she still hasn't figured out where the gentiles live. Her existence, like that of her husband (Steven Keats), who came over seven years before her and renamed himself 'Jake', is limited to a few overcrowded blocks on the Lower East Side.

Being stacked on top of one another in tenement apartments leads to a tangled skein of affections. Gitl scarcely recognises her husband without his beard – trimmed into a pompous moustache – while he can barely suppress his distaste for her Old World wigs and headscarves. Jake has played the field in his wife's absence; his latest flame is Mamie (Dorrie Kavanaugh), though his infatuation with her is inseparable from his infatuation with the idea of America: baseball, democratic vistas, Gibson Girl hair and feathered hats. (Gitl models one, shyly, in the mirror, the most touching millinery-related scene since *Ninotchka*.)

Silver's film, adapted from Abraham Cahan's 1896 novel *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*, features a number of moments in courtyards, hallways, staircases and lobbies and on rooftops – liminal spaces, in which the characters can steal a few moments of privacy. The tension between keeping up appearances and a furtive, hidden life builds towards an eruption of psychological violence, followed by a coda in which Silver's extraordinary cinematic acuity and sensitivity are abundantly evident: a proposal of marriage by a repressed, middle-aged Talmudic scholar (Mel Howard); the exchange of the *get* (writ of divorce) between Gitl and



## PERSONALITY CRISIS

At once sex-horror and obsessive art movie, Walerian Borowczyk's extraordinary film offers a unique take on a much adapted classic

### THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MISS OSBOURNE

Walerian Borowczyk; France 1981; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual-Format; 91 minutes; 1.66:1; Certificate 18; Features: audio commentary, interviews with Udo Kier, Marina Pierro and Alessio Pierro, video essay by Adrian Martin and Cristina Alvarez Lopez, 'Eyes That Listen' featurette, 'Happy Toy' (1979), 'Returning to Méliès: Borowczyk and Early Cinema'

**Reviewed by Kim Newman**

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) is among the most adapted of all novels. Shortly after publication, the American actor Richard Mansfield took the dual role on stage in a play written by Thomas Russell Sullivan which became famous for its set-piece transformation. In the months between book and play, Stevenson's surprise ending – that Jekyll is Hyde – became common knowledge, so few adaptations follow the author's careful mystery plot. The first film version, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, appeared in 1908, with Hobart Bosworth in the leads, and there were dozens of silent versions – 1920 alone saw an elaborate John Barrymore vehicle (perhaps the first horror film to make much of Victorian London as a period setting), a cheap knock-off starring Sheldon Lewis, and FW. Murnau's lost *Der Januskopf* (with Conrad Veidt).

The book's status as classic literature as well as 'fine bogey tale' – plus central roles that appeal to show-off character actors – attracted directors and stars from outside the horror ghetto. Rouben Mamoulian's 1931 *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* with Fredric March and Victor Fleming's 1941 remake with Spencer Tracy are among the best-produced classic horror films but remain deliriously perverse. March's Mr Hyde was the first monster to earn a Best Actor Oscar (few thought he won for Dr Jekyll), in itself proof that the property was taken more seriously than other contemporary horror films – Boris Karloff wasn't even nominated for *Frankenstein* (1931).

Duality abounds in the history of *Jekyll and Hyde*. On the one hand, the roles appeal to serious actors like Barrymore, March, Tracy, Jean-Louis Barrault, Jack Palance, Kirk Douglas, David Hemmings, Michael Caine, John Malkovich and John Hannah. On the other, it is the classic horror story most often adapted for pornography, with essays in the role(s) from Rocco Siffredi and Taylor Hayes. Walerian Borowczyk's 1981 version – which has a bewildering number of alternate titles but is released here as *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne* – is steeped in Jekyll-and-Hyde and nods to high art and smut. In an interview recorded in the editing room, Borowczyk admits he had looked at Terence Fisher's *The Two Faces of Dr Jekyll* (1960), in which



Rampaging id: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Miss Osbourne*

Paul Massie rang modest changes on the part by playing Jekyll as an elderly, whiskery stiff and Hyde as a handsome, glowering young buck (screenwriter Wolf Mankowitz's indictment of Victorian hypocrisy resonates with Borowczyk's take). It's less likely he saw Andy Milligan's *The Man with Two Heads* aka *Dr Jekyll and Mr Blood* (1972) or Byron Mabe and Lee Raymond's *The Adult Version of Jekyll & Hyde* (1972), but he might well have come across Roy Ward Baker's *Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde* (1971). Nevertheless, his *Strange Case* fits in with such arcana, and might feed into later interpretations like Gérard Kikoïne's *Edge of Sanity* (1989), in which Anthony Perkins prematurely invents crack cocaine. Testimony to Borowczyk's eclectic viewing habits is that he cast Udo Kier (his Dr Jekyll) after seeing him in Charles Matton's *Spermula* (1976) and took Patrick Magee from Steve Roberts's *Sir Henry at Rawlinson End* (1980). The latter item influenced the tone of Jekyll's mad dinner party (though Borowczyk was under the impression that Vivian Stanshall, who also appears in the film, was a woman).

Outside of sex-change variants – Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick in Baker's film, Tim Daly and Sean Young in *Dr Jekyll and Ms Hyde* (1995) – the usual approach is to cast a single actor in the leads, though James Cruze and an uncredited Harry Benham shared duties in a 1912 *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Innokenti Smoktunovsky and Aleksandr Feklistov did the same for *Strannaya istoriya doktora Dzhekila i mistera Khayda* (1987). Borowczyk casts Gérard Zalcberg opposite Kier – an interesting choice because the actors look rather alike, further blurring the characters' identities. Zalcberg's Hyde, like March's, changes appearance throughout the film – he seems to have a moustache outside Jekyll's house, but is

clean-shaven (with a monkish bowl-cut) when rampaging throughout his home, raping men and women alike, gleefully murdering stuffy Victorians – a general, a publisher, a lawyer, a doctor – and awakening a ferocious devotion in Jekyll's fiancée Fanny Osbourne (Marina Pierro), who ultimately follows him into a transforming bath.

It's at once an indulgent sex-horror film and an obsessive art movie, dwelling on a Vermeer or a sewing machine as much as on violated nude corpses. It's also a Sadean comedy, poking crude, lewd fun at all its characters (even Hyde turns bizarrely prudish as he tells a young wanton that she should respect her father – whom he has just murdered with her manic complicity) and unleashing a cinematic id in a manner that is still confrontational and transgressive.

Arrow's Blu-ray release is the first satisfactory home-video edition of a film that has been variously retitled, truncated and mistreated in theatres and on VHS and has long been unavailable in anything like a watchable version. Its moments of hallucinatory violence and lingering shots of bloody aftermath have suffered censorship snips (all restored here), but Borowczyk's elliptical, deliberately fragmentary approach (very unlike the average horror exploitation film) has also given the impression to some viewers that material has been hacked out when in fact many of Hyde's atrocities take place off screen or are viewed oddly askance.

Previous video transfers have struggled with the hazy shadows and mix of precise framing and jittery handheld camerawork (another Jekyll/Hyde duality) but Arrow has done stellar work in reproducing the film's unique look. A wealth of extras includes a 'commentary' track which consists of interviews with creatives (including the late director) expertly stitched together by Daniel Bird, an appreciation of the film by Michael Brooke, a short homage film co-directed by Marina Pierro, a rare Borowczyk short and a piece on Bernard Parmegiani's haunting electronica score.

*It's a Sadean comedy, poking crude, lewd fun at its characters – and it is still confrontational and transgressive cinema*

## Rediscovery

## PRINCE OF PULP

The real taste of crime-fiction writer Charles Willeford's deadpan pulp sensibility can be found in director George Armitage's film

## MIAMI BLUES

George Armitage; USA 1990; Shout! Factory/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 97 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: new interviews with Alec Baldwin and Jennifer Jason Leigh

## Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Depending on your perspective, it is either the tragedy or the triumph of Quentin Tarantino that he has, outside of the possible exception of his Elmore Leonard adaptation *Jackie Brown* (1997), failed to emulate his inspirations. In particular, magpie Tarantino has cited the influence of "modern-day crime fiction" such as that written by Leonard, or Charles Willeford, to whose work Tarantino has likened *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

If you want a real taste of Willeford on screen, however, you'll have to go elsewhere: to *Cockfighter* (1974), by Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* producer Monte Hellman, or George Armitage's *Miami Blues*, an adaptation of the first of Willeford's four books following the misadventures of Miami detective Hoke Moseley and his prey. I have seen *Miami Blues* enough times now that I have begun to play a game that is likely familiar to repeat viewers: with each new go-around, I devote particular attention to a different one of the film's constituent parts.

On the first encounter, it is almost impossible not to fall under the spell of Alec Baldwin's Frederick Frenger Jr, a charismatic con-running psychopath from California who touches down in Miami and starts amassing a body count before he even leaves the airport. This puts Moseley, played by the redoubtable Fred Ward, on his trail – Ward, a co-producer on the film, had initially wanted the flashy Frenger part before ceding the floor to Baldwin, but he plays his position beautifully as the put-upon, trudgingly blue-collar, too-late-the-hero Moseley. (A recent attempt to build a 'quality TV' franchise around the Moseley character, starring a miscast Paul Giamatti, understandably didn't get off the ground.)

Lately, however, I've come to think that Jennifer Jason Leigh's sweet, dim Susie Waggoner is the adhesive that holds the movie together. Working as a call girl under the name 'Pepper', turning tricks to pay for classes at Miami-Dade Community College (where one Charles Willeford was a lecturer), Susie is drawn into Freddie's orbit when he promises her a normal suburban life with all the trimmings. Dumb as she is, Susie knows there's something wrong with the picture-perfect future that Freddie's offering her – he swears he's gone straight but pays for their ranch-style love nest in Coral Gables by sticking up the stick-up men of Miami. Not that it stops Susie becoming invested in it, and when she finally watches Freddie being hauled off to the coroner, her whimpering pathos is truly moving.

Freddie is an amoral blank who is forever slipping in and out of roles; one minute he's Tony Montana counting his money, the next he's a preppie investment banker in lemon slacks and Coogi sweater. His juiciest part, however, is that of Detective Moseley, Miami PD – he gets the drop on Hoke, hoists his badge and gun and uses them as licence to take whatever he wants from the city's criminal class, mouthing unconvincing dialogue half-remembered from TV police procedurals. Thankfully, this isn't just used as an opportunity to ruminate on the (all together now) fine line that separates the criminal from the cop.

More than this, *Miami Blues* is a burlesque treatment of unrealistic caste-hopping aspiration in the Reagan Years. (Released in early 1990 but based on a 1984 novel, it may still be said to belong to the era.) In this, it pairs nicely with Joel and Ethan Coen's 1987 *Raising Arizona*, but while that film (and Nic Cage's performance in it) inclines to a cartoonish broadness, the tone in *Miami Blues* is a deadpan, gallows humour – the presence of Shirley Stoler, co-star of 1969's tabloid-tawdry black comedy

*It is almost impossible not to fall under the spell of Alec Baldwin's charismatic psychopath Frederick Frenger Jr*

*The Honeymoon Killers*, gives some idea of the precedent that director Armitage is aiming for.

Armitage was himself a veteran of the Roger and Gene Corman school, where he did his first film work in the late 60s, alongside Jonathan Demme, a producer on *Miami Blues* who called his old friend back into commission for the film. (Armitage's previous completed project had been the 1979 TV movie *Hot Rod*; his 1976 *Vigilante Force* has, incidentally, been announced for an autumn Blu-ray release by Kino.) Armitage hadn't had the opportunity to meet Willeford when the author was performing in *Cockfighter* for Corman's New World pictures, but he picked up Willeford's dry tone perfectly and, moreover, knew what to cut in translating from page to screen – the fact that one of Frenger's victims is Susie's brother was shrewdly excised from the script. While Willeford's walrus-moustachioed visage is visible in a framed photo in the Miami PD offices, he never got to see *Miami Blues*, dying shortly after his only big payday as a writer of fiction, in 1988.


He couldn't have asked for a better collaborator than Armitage, however, who wouldn't be so lucky with his 2004 Leonard adaptation *The Big Bounce*, neutered by the money men who wanted a PG-13 rating. That was Armitage's last completed project to date – though this new edition of *Miami Blues* should be a reminder of what we've lost by prematurely putting such an inspired director of pulp fiction out to pasture. ☹



Shadows in the Sunshine State: Alec Baldwin as con artist Frederick Frenger Jr



# New releases

 Jake; and the melancholy ending in which two newly formed couples go their separate ways along the mercantile streets of New York, and life, such as it is, goes on.

**Disc:** A new transfer that lets the film's black-and-white photography shine, though one could wish for some contextualising extras, for this is, after all, a major work of the fecund 1970s US cinema.

## THE HOUSE OF MYSTERY

Alexandre Volkoff; France 1923; Flicker Alley/Region 0 NTSC; 383 minutes; 4:3; Features: booklet, production stills

**Reviewed by Michael Atkinson**

Flicker Alley, Lobster Films and Blackhawk Films continue their fascinating revivification of Les Films Albatros – a silent-era outfit made up largely of Russian émigrés who'd relocated to Paris after the Bolshevik Revolution – with this massive, ambitious serial, based on a popular novel by prolific pulp master Jules Mary. Even given the pioneering sublimity of Feuillade, silent serials were the trash TV of the pre-talkie era, routinely dismissed as lowbrow, but Alexandre Volkoff's six-and-a-half-hour, ten-chapter saga *The House of Mystery* was an apparent exception, hailed as having elevated the conventions of cliffhanger melodrama with nuance and passion.

It's a fair claim – this rollercoaster heartreder comes close to encompassing every serious melodramatic plot twist and convention you can name, but does it all with deftness, seriousness and a sharp sense of visual storytelling. At the centre, as with many Albatros films, is star (and co-screenwriter) Ivan Mosjoukine, here resembling a mash-up of Bradley Cooper and Franklin Pangborn; capable of outlandish egomaniacal grandiloquence elsewhere, in *The House of Mystery* he is subtle and graceful, and perfectly able to scale the facade of a castle if the plot requires it.

And it does – Mosjoukine is the wealthy scion of a textile empire who marries a general's daughter (Hélène Darly) of, it turns out, questionable parentage, and thereby provokes the envious scheming of his childhood friend and factory manager (Charles Vanel, in the eighth feature of his 70-year career). Secrets are revealed, murders are committed, blackmail is perpetrated, innocents are framed, identities are abandoned, hearts are broken, wars are fought, children grow up and are preyed upon, suicide pacts are made, years pass by – the gist of Volkoff's film could sustain a year's worth of soap opera.

Thankfully, it's more than just the interbellum version of contemporary TV drama: passages of the film are dazzling, particularly a chain-gang escape worthy of any action film, in which the prisoners (led by Mosjoukine's beleaguered hero) hijack a locomotive and are pursued over the mountainous landscape by a dauntless posse of several dozen pith-helmeted *gendarmes* on horseback, culminating in a canyon-spanning 'human bridge'. Measure this pop-art marathon against other post-Feuillade serials – not against, say, the films Gance and L'Herbier were making at around the same time – and you have a landmark, long forgotten and only recently rediscovered.

**Disc:** Glowing restoration by the Cinéma-thèque française, struck from the original negative, with very little deterioration. The booklet essays, by Lenny Borger, are simply informational, and vital.



Pen pals: *A Letter to Three Wives*

## A LETTER TO THREE WIVES

Joseph L. Mankiewicz; USA 1949; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate U; 103 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary with Kenneth Geist, Cheryl Lower and Christopher Mankiewicz, Fox Movietone newsreel of Academy Awards ceremony

**Reviewed by Kate Stables**

His first hit as a director after several undistinguished outings, this crisp and witty comedy of manners about suburban matrimony reveals the beginnings of Joseph Mankiewicz's distinctive style. Smartly self-aware, with its teasing voiceover and plaited story of rueful marital memories, it formally prefigures *All About Eve* (1950) and the graveside flashbacks of *The Barefoot Contessa* (1954).

The letter of the title is written to three women – Jeanne Crain's Deborah, Ann Sothern's Rita and Linda Darnell's Lora – by their 'best friend' Addie Ross, to inform them that she is running off with one of their husbands. But the film's sharp social satire casts a wider net, taking on the growth of middle-class suburbia, career women and the homecoming pains of returning veterans (here it's Crain's gauche farm girl, drunkenly scandalising the country club). High culture goes to war with 40s wireless 'bilge' too, as Sothern's ambitious writer Rita helms a doomed dinner party, where even Thelma Ritter's raspingly cynical maid is considered ripe for radio-marketing 'penetration'. Indeed, the crackling anti-advertising rant delivered by Kirk Douglas (as Rita's husband) was powerful enough to be lopped out of American TV showings for years afterwards.

Fascinated here, as always, by the overreaching female, Mankiewicz gets his heroines pushing at their social boundaries. Shoving hardest of all is gold-digger Lora, whose seemingly merciless mission to marry her hard-boiled boss gets a surprisingly sympathetic, class-conscious treatment. Floating above it all is Celeste Holm's purring, knowing narration, unravelling a husband-stealing mystery whose two-step reveal was unexpectedly open to rival interpretations. So much so that General Douglas MacArthur took time out to contact Mankiewicz to discover who really ran off with Addie.

**Disc:** A fine transfer, which shows off designer Kay Nelson's costumes nicely, right down to the monster flower details on Crain's ill-fated dinner dress. Kenneth Geist and Cheryl Lower's detailed contributions make for a top-notch commentary.

## MEAN STREETS

Martin Scorsese; USA 1973; Icon Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 112 minutes; 16:9; Features: commentary, production featurette

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Technically a third feature, this was the first authentic 'film di Martin Scorsese', and if the style, preoccupations and casting have become far more familiar over time, it's still possible to appreciate how joltingly different it must have seemed in 1973. The milieu of smalltime crooks was already familiar but Scorsese injected a sensibility drawn both from his already beloved Italian cinema and from his deep Catholic faith: this was only a few years after he had seriously considered the priesthood as a career option.

The film's famously pithy no-bullshit opening voiceover (spoken by the director, as though delivering a God-like admonition of his wayward creation) sets the tone: throughout what follows, Charlie (Harvey Keitel) is keenly aware of the imbalance between his lifestyle and his spiritual needs. He lights a match and deliberately burns his hand to ensure that he's punished for a self-perceived transgression, while the deep red lighting of the barroom scenes establishes (and, admittedly, slightly overeggs) a hellish quasi-expressionism that would find full flower in *Taxi Driver* three years later. But that film was at least as much Paul Schrader's brainchild, while *Mean Streets* was drawn from Scorsese's own life: he knew the mean streets of Little Italy so well that he could convey their essence even when production logistics prevented most of the film being shot in New York itself.

The slangily colloquial script ("What's a mook?"), editing and music are as electrifying as ever, not least because of the latter's incongruity – who else would have thought of staging a barroom brawl to the Marvelettes' 'Please Mr Postman'? The double act between Keitel and Robert De Niro, the latter's Johnny Boy visibly shaking off the fetters applied to earlier performances, is a masterclass in contrasting but complementary character types, with Keitel shouldering the more challenging role. Indeed, the crucial difference between Charlie and Johnny is that only one of them is aware (and constantly aware at that) that he's giving a performance which has to be carefully modulated and recalibrated with each successive encounter involving people he didn't actually grow up with.

**Disc:** Although not as pin-sharp as Sony's lustrous restoration of *Taxi Driver*, this is still a substantial advance on earlier video versions. Scorsese is the main speaker on a strongly autobiographical commentary track.

## NYMPHOMANIAC: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT

Lars von Trier; Denmark/Belgium/France/Germany 2013; Artificial Eye/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 325 minutes; Certificate 18; 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: interviews

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

The 'soft' version of Lars von Trier's voyage around self-confessed nymphomaniac Joe's psyche ran a whisker over four hours, while this 'hard' version is nearly five-and-a-half. But although there's certainly more explicit sexual material on offer, most of the



# Television

## MOONDIAL

Colin Cant; UK 1988; BBC/Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 158 minutes; 4:3. Features: interviews with and episode commentaries by Colin Cant and Siri Neal

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

*Moondial* sits in a British, perhaps specifically English, tradition of children's fiction, in which time breaks down and either the child protagonist slips backwards into the past or the dead are somehow alive in the present (the 'somehow' is important: explanations are not part of the deal). The genre includes *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *Stig of the Dump*, *The Owl Service*, *The Children of Green Knowe* and *Earthfasts*, and goes back at least as far as Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

For British viewers of a certain age, this adaptation of Helen Cresswell's novel has a powerful nostalgic draw, but it is also surprisingly effective for the newcomer, thanks to an atmospheric setting (Belton House in Lincolnshire), well filmed, and fine central performances. Siri Neal, 14 when this was made, carries the whole enterprise. She plays Minty, a modern schoolgirl awaiting news of her critically injured mother, who discovers that an old sundial, supported by eerie-looking sculptures of Eros and Chronos, can whisk her back to the 19th century and beyond. In the past she encounters other lonely children whom she is fated (somehow) to rescue; she also meets an evil governess who is (somehow) reincarnated as a modern-day ghost-hunter – both parts played by Jacqueline Pearce (the evil Servan in *Blake's 7*).

Neal's occasional bursts of drama-school overacting are more than made up for by her young-old face and an edge of unaffected otherworldliness; she's matched by Tony Sands as a worryingly authentic-looking Victorian kitchen boy.

**Disc:** Decent transfer from original video.

The interviews and commentaries are rather sweet, the filming having evidently been a high point for both Cant and Neal.

## WOLF HALL

Peter Kosminsky; UK 2015; BBC/2entertain/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 350 minutes; 16:9. Features: cast and director interviews, featurettes, deleted scenes

**Reviewed by Robert Hanks**

Everybody loves a Tudor, whether virginal or serially polygamous. The Tudors, which in effect means Bad King Henry and Good Queen Bess, have become our great national epic, a story continually being retold, familiar characters revamped and retconned, to suit the mood of the times. The BBC-Showtime series *The Tudors* was consciously a soap opera, political power reduced to sex 'n' celebrity – it began in 2007, the same year as *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. That was also just before the global banking crisis hit.

*Wolf Hall* is a more anxious, post-crisis version. In the third episode, when Henry Percy, the young Earl of Northumberland, threatens to disrupt Henry's plans to marry Anne Boleyn, Thomas Cromwell (Mark Rylance) sets him straight: "The world is not run from where you think it is, from border fortresses – even from Whitehall. The world is run from Antwerp, from Florence, from Lisbon, from wherever the merchant ships set sail off into the west. Not from castle walls –



**Moondial** It sits in a tradition of children's fiction in which time breaks down and either the protagonist slips back into the past or the dead are somehow alive

from counting houses." In a visually rich series, candlelight and summer illuminating mellow medieval bricks and stone and sumptuous furs and silks, the image that sticks in the mind is Rylance's face, creased with fear or guilt.

Peter Kosminsky's adaptation of Hilary Mantel's novel has received almost universal acclaim, and deserves most of it. The acting is what strikes you: Rylance's constrained, watchful Cromwell is the most remarkable thing, rising from likeable outsider-on-the-make to ruthless insider struggling to protect his position – and allowing the viewer to look back and see that the ruthlessness was always there. (How will the next book, *Bring Up the Bodies*, work, now that Cromwell has forfeited so much sympathy?) His performance is composed of small, deft touches; at his first meeting with Henry, he speaks frankly, even chafes the king, apparently indifferent to the difference in status; but as Henry turns away, seemingly charmed, you see in Rylance a relief that he has got away with it, a release of tension (again: you look back and see what was already there). His most characteristic move, almost a catchphrase, is the doffing of his cap, pulling it off from the back of his head forward as he makes obeisance. There are several excellent women as well, including Claire Foy as Anne,


at first ambitious, clever and winning, then overreaching, peremptory and vain; and Jessica Raine as her poisonous sister-in-law. Damian Lewis's Henry is a shade less convincing – he gets the younger Henry's likeability and his later paranoia, but something is lacking from the transition. Perhaps that is a flaw in Peter Straughan's screenplay, otherwise a smart combination of the eloquent and boldly elliptical.

The story is not always easy to follow, and Kosminsky shows a streak of literal-mindedness in his blunt use of flashback and fantasy. But these are minor drawbacks. With the partial exception of *Shakespeare in Love*, no other Tudor fiction has better conveyed the fragility and terror of life in the 16th century – or, you may infer, now.

**Disc:** A crisp picture shows off the gorgeous lighting and colour; sound reproduction is good but the deliberately realistic recording style means that dialogue can often get lost, and subtitles are a useful adjunct: annoyingly, these are not always well done, with speakers occasionally misnamed and inappropriate homophones. (In one of the interviews, Peter Kosminsky is made to refer to the Morays of the times, rather than the mores. Or have I missed an eel reference?) The featurettes are informative about context and acting, if blandly done.



# New releases

 additional 84 minutes are devoted to expanding existing scenes and inserting new ones, the nearly three-hour 'Volume Two' being the main beneficiary. Some new material lightens the mood (Joe's attempt to 'innocently' purchase a used riding crop is almost a comedy skit) but most darkens it considerably, including what must be the most detailed and contextually confrontational abortion scene ever featured in a non-documentary. Von Trier is no stranger to lurching tonal shifts but they've never been quite this extreme before – though given that the subject matter is irrational sexual obsession, they're also more than justified.

The theme most conspicuously amplified in this longer version is that of mortality and physical fragility. In between vigils by her father's deathbed, Joe discusses what might be happening to his brain with a sympathetic but helpless doctor, while the encounter with Jamie Bell's professional sadist is more prolonged and the one with the preposterously well-endowed Africans more physically detailed – in this case to such an extent that the end result looks more like part of a pumping mechanism with colour-coded components than anything even vaguely erotic. (Presumably because of this, the BBFC has passed the film without cuts.)

Extreme female masochism has long been a key ingredient in von Trier's cinema. But while *Nymphomaniac* goes much further down this route even than 2009's *Antichrist* (whose opening it directly quotes and whose self-mutilation it alludes to), it also shows far more genuine interest in getting inside its protagonist's head. The bookending 'confession' with the self-consciously intellectual interlocutor Seligman (such a hoary old sex-film cliché that it becomes weirdly invigorating when performed by actors of the subtlety of Charlotte Gainsbourg and Stellan Skarsgård) is both more playfully digressive and much more detailed in its attempt at laying Joe psychologically bare, which among other things gives the abrupt ending greater impact since we've spent so much longer in their company.

**Disc:** Each 'volume' gets its own disc, to maximise the consistently superb audiovisual quality, and the extras from the earlier Blu-ray and DVD release of the theatrical cut are included too.

## RETALIATION

Hasebe Yasuharu; Japan 1968; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 94 minutes; 2.35:1; Features: interview with Tony Rayns, interview with Shishido Jo

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

In the late 1960s, shortly before it turned its attention to softcore porn, Nikkatsu was Japan's prime producer of *yakuza* thrillers. Hasebe Yasuharu, formerly assistant to Suzuki Seijun, made his directorial debut in 1966 with the studio's *Black Tight Killers*, about a group of young female ninjas who kill people with razor-edged seven-inch EP records. *Retaliation*, his third film as director, made two years later, explores a favourite theme of *yakuza* films: the gangster who infiltrates two rival gangs and sets them destroying each other. Suzuki had used a similar plot in *Youth of the Beast* (1963), and both films of course glance back to Kurosawa's classic *Yojimbo* (1961).



Robert Montgomery (left) in *Ride the Pink Horse*

In some ways Hasebe inherited Suzuki's role at Nikkatsu, after the older director had been sacked for making (according to CEO Hori Kyusaku) "films that don't make money and don't make sense". Hasebe's films may never be quite as visually or conceptually wild as Suzuki's, but they share something of the same breakneck cutting and tumultuous approach to staging action. A scene in *Retaliation* in which a man is brutally tortured to death, repeatedly intercut with convulsive moves on a nightclub dance floor, shows Hasebe at his most aggressive. And after a violent confrontation starts in an urban courtyard, the camera abruptly cuts away to an extreme high angle, with the brawl relegated to a tiny corner of the screen, as if suggesting it's of little importance.

Just to up the ante, Hasebe tosses in a homoerotic frisson between his lead (Kobayashi Akira) and his enemy-turned-ally (pouch-cheeked Shishido Jo, star of Suzuki's 1967 film *Branded to Kill*).

**Disc:** Useful setting-in-context from Tony Rayns, and reminiscences from the elderly Shishido Jo. A clean, vivid transfer from original elements.

## RIDE THE PINK HORSE

Robert Montgomery; USA 1947; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 101 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio commentary, interview with Imogen Sara Smith, Lux Radio Theatre adaptation of the film from 1947

### Reviewed by Jordan Cronk

Journeyman actor Robert Montgomery only directed a handful of films in his career but they're stylish and memorable enough to stand as more than a mere addendum to his filmography. Following a stint in the navy during World War II, Montgomery returned to Hollywood in 1945 with a renewed sense of creativity, assisting John Ford on *They Were Expendable* before releasing his own first film, *Lady in the Lake*, in early 1947. *Ride the Pink Horse* would follow later that same year, and it stands not only as Montgomery's best work but as one of the more unique and indelible entries in the history of film noir.

Set in the dusty south-west town of San Pablo and starring Montgomery as Gagin, an ex-GI out to avenge the death of a friend at the hands of a sleazy gangster named Hugo (Fred Thomas), *Ride the Pink Horse* makes striking use of both its border-straddling milieu and the convergence of cultures characterised by this setting. Newly arrived, Gagin reluctantly befriends two colourful locals – a Mexican

carousel operator (Thomas Gomez) and a young Native American woman (Wanda Hendrix) – to assist in his quest. Meanwhile, an FBI agent (Art Smith) has trailed Gagin in an attempt to thwart his revenge plot and arrest Hugo in the process.

Montgomery's directorial hand is confident and expressive, crafting a clammy, crepuscular atmosphere from just a handful of striking sets and evocative exteriors. Russell Metty's cinematography boldly captures the nuances of the locale with a roaming lens and nimble sense of space and setting (including an impressive, unbroken opening shot). And the script, by Ben Hecht and Charles Lederer, is equally vivid, full of quirky character detail and biting repartee. It's a dramatically satisfying film, just strange enough to confirm a singular passion and commitment on the part of its creator.

**Disc:** Criterion's Blu-ray transfer is appropriately rich and textured, while the adoring tone of the supplements suggests the film may soon claim its place in the pantheon of *film noir*.

## SUPERNATURAL


Victor Halperin; USA 1933; Universal Vault Series/Region 1 DVD; 64 minutes; 1.33:1

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

An early example of the makers of a low-budget indie breakout horror hit being signed for a bigger project by a major studio, *Supernatural* was made at Paramount – the classiest of the majors in 1933 – by director Victor Halperin as a follow-up to his Poverty Row classic *White Zombie*. It's a fascinating mix of the bizarre and the conventional, affords Carole Lombard one of her strangest roles and is awash with pre-Code hints of perversion – though it really needed someone of the stature of Karloff or Lugosi in the villain role rather than the chubby, unimpressive Alan Dinehart.

The film opens with murderess Ruth Rogen (Vivienne Osborne) going to the electric chair unrepentant and angry at confederate Paul Bavian (Dinehart), who has betrayed her to the authorities. Then attention shifts to *ingénue* Roma Courtney (Lombard), a wealthy young woman whose twin brother John (Lyman Williams) has recently died. Roma is targeted by Bavian, a bogus spiritualist who sneaks into the funeral parlour to make a death mask of the dead man for use in fake seances. However, the mystic wires get crossed and Roma is possessed by Ruth, prompting Lombard to drop the heiress act and sink her teeth into more entertaining depravity as she trumps Bavian's scheming with her own vengeful perfidy.

A miscast Randolph Scott stands around in a tux as Roma's dull love interest, and there are too many drawing-room chats between the more interesting low-life material. But let off the leash, Lombard is devastating... and interestingly matched by the little-known Osborne. Screenwriter Garnett Weston throws in a benign supernatural element as the dead brother also manifests to influence the outcome, which makes for a three-way tussle between good and bad ghosts and a human villain over the fate of the heroine – an idea more impressive in the concept than the execution.

**Disc:** One of Universal's barebones Vault issues, but a decent transfer. 

# Lost and found

## THE RECKONING

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Jack Gold's 1969 film about a man returning to the working-class north of his childhood is more than just the Liverpudlian *Get Carter*

By Michael Pattison

It would be a gross under-description – as these things often are – to call *The Reckoning* (1969) the Liverpudlian *Get Carter*, especially given that the former predates the latter by two years. But the similarities between the two might account for why one is now (legitimately) regarded a classic, while the other has (unfairly) fallen into relative obscurity. Both are muscular films that see prodigal sons returning from adopted London stomping grounds to hometowns in the north. In *The Reckoning*, Michael Marler, a businessman of Irish Catholic descent, returns to the working-class Liverpool of his childhood when his father dies unexpectedly, while in *Get Carter*, ruthless gangster Jack Carter journeys to Newcastle upon Tyne to investigate his brother's supposedly accidental death.

*Get Carter*, adapted from a Ted Lewis novel published the same year *The Reckoning* was released, is the sexier but in some ways the less sophisticated of the two. Boasting Tyneside locales, an infamous murder scene and the exemplification of cockney charm in Michael Caine, it's a gangster thriller that has intimidated and swaggered its way into the pantheon of great British films. In contrast, *The Reckoning* – a delightfully scathing, richly layered film whose frequently funny script was adapted by John McGrath from Patrick Hall's 1967 novel *The Harp That Once* – is not so much a thriller as a tormented character study, featuring a less enduringly attractive central performance from Nicol Williamson, the blue-eyed, fair-headed and impossibly built son of a Scottish factory owner.

Though there are typically cruddy versions of *The Reckoning* on YouTube, there's no official DVD of the film. I saw it, on 35mm, during the McGrath retrospective at Edinburgh Film Festival last year. In light of a government now likely to leave northern, deindustrialised cities like Liverpool even further behind, however, such neglect needs to be addressed sooner rather than later.

McGrath wrote the film for Jack Gold – the director with whom he had collaborated a year earlier in adapting his own play *The Bofors Gun*. By the time he died of leukaemia aged 66 in 2002, the Birkenhead-born Oxford graduate was best known for the stage productions with which in later years he'd rallied for Scottish independence, firstly in *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil* (1973) and then in *Border Warfare* (1989) and *John Brown's Body* (1990). The aggression and wit displayed in these films find their embryo in *The Reckoning*.

In early scenes, Marler cuts a self-loathing figure tired of London life: a man torn by both



Due north: Nicol Williamson as Michael Marler and Rachel Roberts as Joyce Eglington


*Class is the elephant in the room for Marley: he bears the burden of having jumped up a rung*

his own social ascension and his awareness of it. Not only is class the angry elephant in the room for Marler, but he also bears the burden of having jumped up a rung: his motives will always be seen as ulterior, while those of long-suffering, well-to-do wife Rosemary obviously come from her heart. Subsequently, our protagonist treads a fine line between transcending his roots and electing to play the stereotype – as when he gets ferociously drunk and knocks a man out for a slur against his Irish roots. Indeed, Marler is by turns charming and horrid, and

McGrath has the guts to follow through on his protagonist's dramatic contradictions.

The Birkenhead of McGrath's childhood is within visible proximity of Marler's Liverpool. Geoffrey Unsworth's on-location cinematography captures the backstreets of Merseyside with an inevitable grimness, and yet, when our protagonist first snakes through them, the musical score shifts into a rosier, almost patriotic slant. Indeed, there's something reassuringly communal about those scenes in bars and clubs, in bingo halls and wrestling halls, as ordinary working folk engage in liquor, song and fisticuffs.

Made in the same year as *Kes*, *The Reckoning* is another film about northerners fending for themselves. After learning that his dad died from a beating he received from an anti-Irish mob for singing 'Kevin Barry' – a popular song recounting the 1920 hanging of an 18-year-old IRA member – it's Marler's self-imposed responsibility to pursue justice. Much to his horror, he discovers that the murderer in question is not only as inscrutably young as Kevin Barry was, but that he's also unmistakably redheaded – the implication being that he is, like Marler, of Irish blood.

For a moment, our protagonist looks deflated and disarmed by the younger man's quivering pleas; but then, he's doomed to reproduce the confused self-hatred that British imperialism fosters. Just as class tensions spark and corrode his marriage, Marler's Irishness turns on itself in retaliation for a hate crime whose root cause is England-cum-Britain's long history of suppressing and displacing entire races. As Marler himself wistfully says when looking at an old photograph of himself, "If I'd known I'd grow up to be an English businessman..." Have we ever known what's good for us? 

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'Little more than a string of clichés tortuously contrived or boringly obvious... Situations are

reduced to formulas and characters to caricatures. [There is a] diluting and trivialising of the special kind of acting energy that Williamson possesses: the honesty of his self-searching reduced to a collection of loaded close-ups...'

Richard Cohen 'Monthly Film Bulletin', February 1970



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# UPS, DOWNS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

## THE LIVES OF ROBERT RYAN

By J.R. Jones, Wesleyan University Press, 368pp, \$30, ISBN 9780819573728

### Reviewed by Philip French

Martin Scorsese rightly called Robert Ryan “one of the greatest actors in the history of American film”, and J.R. Jones in his excellent biography shows what a fascinating career it was – complicated, contradictory, accidental. Born in 1909 in Chicago (where Jones now works as critic for the *Chicago Reader*), Ryan was raised in a moderately prosperous middle-class Catholic home as an only child after the death of his six-year-old brother, and developed an early interest in moviemaking at the nearby Essanay Studios where Chaplin had spent a crucial few months in 1915. In this Irish-American world he had a solid formal education in school, and outside it an informal one in hard drinking, social prejudice and corrupt politics. From Chicago he moved through private prep school to Dartmouth College, the Ivy League university in New Hampshire to which he remained devoted for the rest of his life. A handsome six-foot-three athlete and intercollegiate boxing champion, he became a popular student, drifted away from Catholicism and graduated at the height of the Depression without any particular ambition except a rather vague one of becoming a writer.

After a period of drifting and a stretch in the merchant navy, he was drawn back to Chicago by filial responsibilities and declining family fortunes and spent another couple of years involved in tough manual labour that Jones sees as hardening him physically and mentally. From this he escaped through the agency of a politically connected relative who provided him with a guilt-inducing sinecure, and a neighbourhood theatre producer who gave him a taste for acting. Aged 30 he set out to try his luck in Los Angeles where he had two major strokes of good fortune that helped shape his career. The first was signing on at the adventurous Max Reinhardt Theatre Workshop where the great Austrian exile encouraged his ambitions. The second was meeting striking fellow student Jessica Cadwalader, a Californian Quaker from a distinguished family that had fallen on hard times due to the Depression. She was to become his devoted wife and moral compass.

Things progressed unspectacularly, but by the end of World War II Ryan was an experienced actor, had a contract at RKO (which for a while made him an employee of the mercurial, right-wing Howard Hughes), was married with a baby son and had served as an instructor in the US Marine Corps. Meanwhile, Jessica had published two well-received novels and was



**Rogues' gallery:** Robert Ryan's most memorable roles were racists, bigots and malevolent malcontents

to write successful children's books, which briefly put her career ahead of her husband's. This was to change shortly after the war with the appearance of *Crossfire* (1947), the controversial *noir* thriller that brought Ryan an

Oscar nomination as a virulently anti-Semitic sergeant who murders a kindly Jewish civilian.

Thereafter he would be a star of the second magnitude in Hollywood action movies and westerns, and a key figure of *film noir* in its



mid-20th century heyday. His specialties were senior military men in conventional war movies, deeply conflicted heroes or anti-heroes in search of revenge or redemption in psychological dramas, and – most memorably – creating a rogues' gallery of racists, bigots and malevolent malcontents. His performances were notable for their subtle understatement, an implicit social and psychological subtext and the absence of ethnic undertones. One thinks of such movies as Max Ophuls's *Caught* (1948), Anthony Mann's *The Naked Spur* (1953), John Sturges's *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1954), Robert Wise's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959) and, supremely, his demonic Claggart tormenting the angelic Terence Stamp in Peter Ustinov's *Billy Budd* (1962). Easygoing heroes and traditional romance were not his forte, but the despicable or villainous characters for which he became famous were challenges to him as an actor and connected to his need to confront prejudice, ignorance and injustice.

Off stage and in private life he was kindly, soft-spoken and generous. As Jones demonstrates at considerable length, he was a man of liberal principle and moral courage, a loving if somewhat distant father and a devoted (and, by Hollywood standards, faithful) husband. His record on civil

*The despicable characters for which he became famous connected to his need to confront prejudice, ignorance and injustice*

rights, his frequent challenges to authority, his eloquent support of often unpopular causes made him a beacon of good sense and decency in the dark times of McCarthyism, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam that overshadowed his whole life. His idea of a hero was the reasonable Adlai Stevenson.

Jones's thoughtful, thoroughly researched book takes a balanced view of Ryan's achievements, being invariably right about the work that will endure and fair in his treatment of the films that didn't come off or were undertaken to feed his family. He is frank and uncensorious about the couple's heavy drinking, which was part of the booze culture of those years. It contributed to Jessica's breakdown and early death, and though Ryan cut down for a while after being diagnosed with alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver, he was again drinking heavily when he died of cancer at 74. The book is a story of ups and downs and disappointments. Jessica felt unappreciated, Ryan thought he deserved roles that went to Gregory Peck. But the book ends on a strongly affirmative note with Ryan rediscovering his Irish-American roots in outstanding performances of plays by America's greatest dramatist, Eugene O'Neill: a stage version of *Long Day's Journey Into Night* on Broadway (which I had the privilege of seeing when he first performed it at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1967), and John Frankenheimer's film of *The Iceman Cometh*, released several months after his death. 🍷

## COMPOUND CINEMATICS

### AKIRA KUROSAWA AND I

By Shinobu Hashimoto, translated by Lori Hitchcock Morimoto, Vertical, 256pp, \$21.95, ISBN 9781939130570

#### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Few screenwriters can have made such an auspicious screen debut as Hashimoto Shinobu. Around 1947 when, recently discharged from the army, he was still writing scripts on spec in the hope of a breakthrough, a screenplay he'd written based on a story by Akutagawa Ryunosuke (often considered the father of the Japanese short story) was sent to the rising star of Japanese cinema Kurosawa Akira. After about a year's silence, to his amazement, he received a postcard summoning him to a meeting with the director. And three years later, when *Rashomon* (1950) took the Venice Festival – and then the world – by storm, Hashimoto's name featured alongside Kurosawa's in the credits.

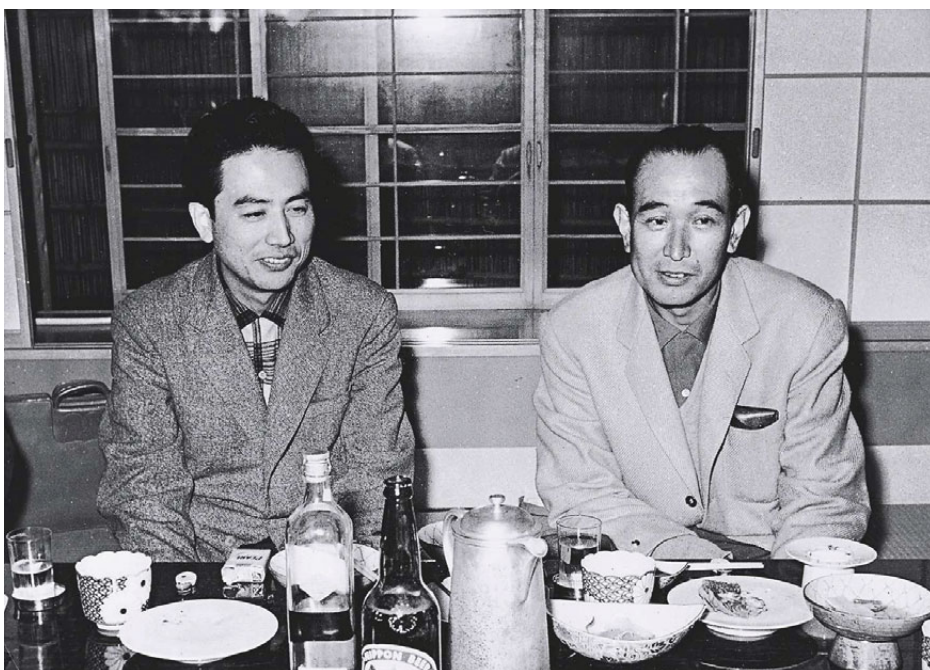
Hashimoto went on to co-script several of Kurosawa's greatest films, including *Ikiru* (1952), *Seven Samurai* (1954) and *Throne of Blood* (1957). 'Co-script' because, apart from his first four and last three films, when he took the sole screenplay credit, Kurosawa always preferred to work with one or more writers. Much of Hashimoto's book is taken up with accounts of these sessions with what he calls 'Team Kurosawa', and it's fascinating to see how some of Japanese cinema's best-loved movies evolved from what sound like distinctly unpromising concepts. *Seven Samurai*, we learn, started out as *A Samurai's Day*, a ploddingly prosaic idea that luckily foundered on the all-important question of whether a samurai of the early Tokugawa era would have eaten three meals a day, or only two.

Demanding and often choleric, Kurosawa wasn't always the easiest person to work with, and Hashimoto's view of him, though respectful and affectionate, is far from uncritical. Where the director started to go wrong, he believes, is when he moved from the classic approach of developing a script through multiple drafts to what Hashimoto calls the "straight-to-final draft" system, created in a brainstorming session. It's to this system that he attributes the failure of *I Live in Fear* (1955) and of several of Kurosawa's subsequent movies. After *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) Shinobu went off to work for other directors – most notably Kobayashi Masaki, for

*It's fascinating to see how some of Japanese cinema's best-loved movies evolved from what sound like unpromising concepts*

whom he furnished the script for *Harakiri* (1962) – besides directing on his own account. He only returned to Kurosawa for *Dodes'ka-den* (1970), the last film on which the two men collaborated.

This is a disarmingly chatty, often discursive book. Hashimoto seems anxious to let us know exactly which trains he took to get where: "I transferred from the Odakyu to the Inogashira Line, then returned from Shibuya to Okachimachi via the Yamanote Line's inner loop..." runs a typical sentence. And his recollections of working on the script of *The Hidden Fortress* (1958) are mostly taken up with detailed descriptions of the various regional dishes that Kurosawa and his three co-writers prepared for each other at their hotel. But along with all this, we get intriguing insights into the writer-director relationship, and into the working methods of one of the last century's leading filmmakers. 🍷



My dinner with Akira: Hashimoto Shinobu (left) with Kurosawa Akira



## CHARLIE CHAPLIN: THE KEYSTONE ALBUM

### The Invention of the Tramp

Edited by Sam Stourdze and Carole Sandrin, text by Glenn Mitchell, Editions Xavier Barral, 112pp, \$180, ISBN 9782365110679

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Charlie Chaplin, in his 1964 memoir *My Autobiography*, told his version of the invention of his most famous character, the Little Tramp. Chaplin was on the lot of Mack Sennett's Keystone Studios, with whom the 24-year-old had signed a \$150-a-week contract, and had just appeared in his first short, *Making a Living*, playing a smug dandy with a Snidely Whiplash mien in a top hat, monocle and fitted frock coat. For his next outing, he was grasping about for something else: "On the way to wardrobe I thought I would dress in baggy pants, big shoes, a cane and a derby hat. I wanted everything a contradiction: the pants baggy, the coat tight, the hat small and the shoes large. I was undecided whether to look old or young, but remembering Sennett had expected me to be a much older man, I added a small moustache which, I reasoned, would add age without hiding my expression. I had no idea of the character. But the moment I was dressed, the clothes and the make-up made me feel the person he was. I began to know him, and by the time I walked on to the stage he was fully born."

The short that resulted was *Mabel's Strange Predicament* (1914), one of 29 films that are broken down into constituent still images in the pages of *Charlie Chaplin: The Keystone Album*, a piece of visual film analysis first assembled in the 1930s, which covers most of the output of Chaplin's year-long engagement with Sennett's company. A hefty volume contained in an embossed slipcover, published by Editions Xavier Barral in collaboration with the Musée de l'Elysée, *The Keystone Album* is certainly the most lavish Chaplin-related tome presently on the market—at least until the appearance of the deluxe *The Charlie Chaplin Archives* volume due in September from Taschen, a collaboration between the Chaplin Archives Property and Cineteca di Bologna, which, along with the BFI and Lobster Films, were vitally involved in memorialising the Tramp's centennial. *The Keystone Album* is a curious artefact, with something of the look of an ex-vaudevillean's scrapbook, the sort of thing *Limelight's* Calvero the clown might've had banging around in his trunk. Each black-backed page is filled with numbered, chronologically arranged stills from the films, laid out like comic panels, with space devoted to each roughly determined by runtime—six pages go to *Tillie's Punctured Romance*, the first six-reel comedy. The images are accompanied by a hand-written commentary describing the action therein, and also contextualising it in terms of the development of the Tramp persona, not nearly such a bolt-from-the-blue invention as Chaplin had it, but a matter of trial, error and gradual refinement.

*The Keystone Album* reproduces, page by page, still by still (794 in total, and a few empty spaces where others have come loose), an unlabelled piece of visual analysis whose provenance, until recently, was purely a matter of conjecture. The handwritten notes from the original album, reprinted here with minor errors of identification intact, are in English, though two postscript



A clown is born: 1914's *Mabel's Strange Predicament* saw the Tramp appear on screen for the first time

essays, by editors Sam Stourdze and Carole Sandrin, both of the Musée de l'Elysée, and Glenn Mitchell, author of *The Chaplin Encyclopedia*, will require a dusting off of schoolboy French.

Putting together pieces from the Chaplin Archive and the BFI, including a typescript that originally accompanied the album, enabled the identification of *The Keystone Album's* author: Hubert David 'H.D.' Waley (1892-1968). Per

*The development of the Tramp persona was not nearly such a bolt-from-the-blue invention as Chaplin had it*



*Lady and the Tramp: Tillie's Punctured Romance*

Waley's notes, the album was intended to be the first of five such works chronicling the development of Chaplin's art all the way through to *Modern Times* (1936), his most recent film at the time of its assembly. According to Mitchell, Waley was a technical director at the BFI in the 30s, who appears to have had earlier ties to the Bloomsbury Group and who was instrumental in the cataloguing and archiving of the earliest Chaplin shorts, beginning with a call to private collectors and public libraries via BBC radio in early 1938.

Waley traces the development of the Tramp from *Making a Living*, observing that "Chaplin creates the impression that he is heading for a career of heavy villainy tempered by acrobatics", through the cig-puffing, photobombing vagrant in *Kids Auto Races at Venice*, rare facial hair experiments in *Tango Tangles* (sans moustache) and *Mabel at the Wheel* (goatee beard), until the rumpled toper with a lecherous streak seen in films such as *Caught in the Rain* begins to assume a more recognisable face. Waley's text tends towards the dry description of knockabout action—"Their first efforts produce singularly little effect, so they fetch a large mallet which enables them to dispose of [Mack] Swain in a summary fashion"—while noting alternative titles under which the films were rereleased in 1920, as well as early incarnations of gags later to be reused or refined, and other points of interest. (*The Masquerader*, which begins with Chaplin and frequent co-star Fatty Arbuckle quarrelling in a Keystone dressing room, is said to give "a glimpse of Chaplin as he appeared at this time in his private life.")

*The Keystone Album* makes a case for the importance of these primordial films which, per Mitchell, were often dismissed as "hardly more than a warm-up", though the book is also of interest as a tactile relic, a surviving instance of close-reading visual analysis from the pioneer age of film history. The title of Chaplin's last Keystone film makes a suitable subtitle: *His Prehistoric Past*. 9



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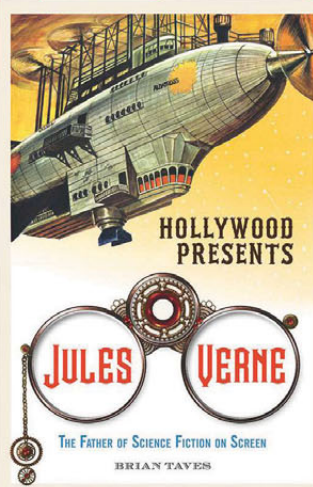


## THE SOUND OF MUSIC

By Caryl Flinn, BFI Classics, Palgrave, 112pp, paperback, illustrated, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574742

Fifty years after its release, *The Sound of Music* (1965) remains the most profitable and recognisable film musical ever made. Quickly consolidating its cultural authority, the Hollywood film soon eclipsed the German film and Broadway musical that preceded it to become one of the most popular cultural reference points of the 21st century. In this fresh exploration, Caryl Flinn foregrounds the film's iconic musical numbers, arguing for their central role in the film's longevity and mass appeal. Stressing the unique emotional bond audiences establish with *The Sound of Music*, Flinn traces the film's prehistories and its place among the tumultuous political, social and cultural events of the 1960s.

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## HOLLYWOOD PRESENTS JULES VERNE

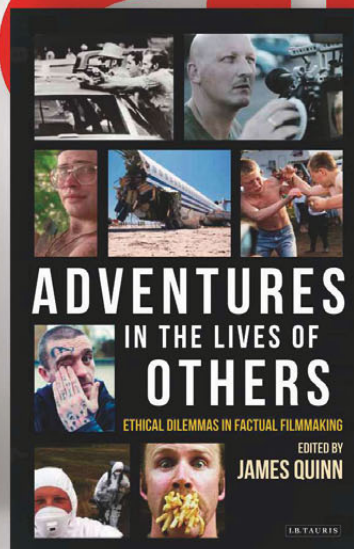
The Father of Science Fiction on Screen

By Brian Taves, University Press of Kentucky, hardback, illustrated, 360pp, £34.95, ISBN 9780813161129

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Ethical Dilemmas in Factual Filmmaking

Edited by James Quinn, I.B. Tauris, 256pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781784533946

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## TOY STORY

A Critical Reading

By Tom Kemper, BFI Film Classics, Palgrave, 112pp, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844576678

The first computer-generated animated feature film, *Toy Story* (1995) sustains a dynamic vitality that proved instantly appealing to audiences of all ages. Tom Kemper traces the film's genesis, production history and reception to demonstrate how its postmodern mishmash of pop culture icons and references represented a fascinating departure from Disney's fine arts style and fairytale naturalism. By foregrounding the way in which *Toy Story* flipped the conventional relationship between films and their ancillary merchandising by taking consumer products as its very subject, Kemper provides an illuminating, revisionist exploration of this groundbreaking classic.

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# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN  
Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

## THE FICKLENESS OF YOUTH

In response to Marsha Rankin's concern about *Sight & Sound* becoming too detached ('Virtual obsolescence', Letters, *S&S*, June), I must say I am more concerned with the increasingly emotive and trivial manner in which most media approach serious subjects. Remaining objective and discursive and not pandering to the fickleness of youth is vital if there is going to be any integrity. The format an individual chooses to watch films on is irrelevant; only the film matters. I have no problem with anybody streaming or downloading.

**Tim Rosam Shepperton**

## GREATEST STORY EVER (MIS)TOLD

In her review of *Second Coming* (Films of the Month, *S&S*, June), Lisa Mullen refers to the main character's mysterious (fatherless?) pregnancy as an "immaculate conception" (which is also used for the picture caption alongside the review). However, that's not in fact what that term means – the Immaculate Conception refers to the (perfectly human) conception of Mary by her own parents, St Anne and St Joachim, the novelty being that Mary was, from the very start, without original sin. It's about that sinlessness. It doesn't refer to Mary's falling pregnant by the Holy Spirit – though journalists tend to assume it does.

**Patrick Fahy London**

## LESSON LEARNED

I would like to say how much I enjoy Hannah McGill's regular 'Object Lesson' column.

I should declare up front a particular interest as a former contributor to the *Guardian's* similarly themed 'Clip Joint' series, at least until it was dumbed down for the click-and-list brigade. Ms McGill's writing is extremely well composed and insightful, bringing a fresh eye to film observation.

What's not to like when, for example, a peek behind the May edition's 'curtains' takes us from Oz to the Red Room via Manderley, riding on the folds of Scarlett O'Hara's dress? Marvellous.

**John Davies Heidelberg, Germany**

## THE LOOK OF LOVE

I was surprised *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) was not included in your 'Remake/remodel' piece (*S&S*, April). It is well known that this seminal film was released and rereleased in many versions, first silent, then later with sound added. But let me offer a little-known work that was remodelled unmercifully, *The Love of Three Queens*, a US/Italy co-production. It was planned as a three-part film with Hedy Lamarr starring in each part, and with a story linking the three tales. These told of the love of Genevieve de Brabant, of the Empress Josephine and of Helen of Troy. Shooting began in Italy in the summer of 1953, in Technicolor, under the direction of Edgar G. Ulmer. (Ulmer left after shooting the Brabant part and was replaced by Marc Allégret). The finished film ran almost three hours and was released in Italy and Spain at

## LETTER OF THE MONTH CONTEMPORARY ART



Given the luxury of more space, I'm sure Nick Pinkerton would have expanded on his view that *Kiss Me, Stupid* (above) "today seems startlingly contemporary" (*Home Cinema*, *S&S*, May). In fact Billy Wilder's film, so maligned in its day, seems to have inspired a whole thriving sub-genre of modern comedy: the celebrity self-parody. Whenever I see Larry David doing an

irritable parody of himself in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, or Ricky Gervais's guests doing badly behaved parodies of themselves in *Extras*, or (especially) Matt LeBlanc doing an oversexed, self-obsessed parody of himself in *Episodes*, they all seem to be channelling Dean Martin in *Kiss Me, Stupid*. Wilder and Martin were simply half a century ahead of their time.

**Jonathan Coe** By email

the end of 1954 as two films, one titled *L'amante di paride* (the Helen of Troy story), the other titled *I cavalieri dell'illusione* (the Brabant and Josephine stories). Various versions followed. The shortest, a 76-minute version titled *The Face That Launched a Thousand Ships*, was passed by the British Board of Film Censors – after cuts – in June 1955. The film was not shown in the US until 1966 and then only on television. This followed more than a year of re-editing undertaken by Lamarr herself during 1957 and 1958 – she had gained control of the footage – and not a little litigation. Titled *The Love of Three Queens*, this version compressed the Brabant, Josephine and Helen of Troy stories, in that order, and a linking story, into 94 minutes. The linking story tells of a tawdry band of roving players presenting each story as a tableau. The players are followed around Europe by an unseen nobleman, enamoured of the troupe's leading lady. He provides a commentary, voiced by Hans Conried in the US version.

**D.J. Turner Ottawa, Canada**

## YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS

I was sorry to hear that Mr Barklam ('No laughing matter', Letters, *S&S*, June) failed to find Noah

Baumbach's masterly *While We're Young* funny. I found it continuously wryly amusing – not laugh-out-loud, except for the *ayahuasca* ceremony sequence – and even more so in retrospect, as one later replays moments that couldn't be sufficiently savoured in the urgent forward momentum of the action. I find the film worthy of instant elevation to classic screwball status.

Mr Barklam also asks, "When are we going to get a film that unites us in appreciative gales of laughter and creates that family feeling that only a genuinely hilarious comedy can bring?"

Well, humour is subjective, of course, but maybe *Paul Blart: Mall Cop 2*?

**Robert Stoker Twickenham**

## Additions and corrections

**June** p.64 *Second Coming*: Certificate 15 104m 49s; p.67 *The Canal*: Certificate 15 93m 14s; p.72 *Futuro Beach*: Certificate 15 106m 42s; p.79 *The Man Who Saved the World*: Certificate 15 109m 47s; p.80 *The New Girlfriend*: Certificate 15 107m 44s; p.83 *Pitch Perfect 2*: USA/Japan 2015 © Universal Studios Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./Fuji Television Network, Inc. Based on the book by Mickey Rapkin Certificate 12A 114m 41s; p.85 *Spring*: Certificate 15 109m 11s; p.88 *Tokyo Tribe*: Certificate 18 116m 23s; p.90 *The Treatment*: Certificate 18 130m 35s;  
**May** p.68 *Amar Akbar & Tony*: Year is 2015; p.75 *Exit*: p.75 Certificate PG 94m 19s; p.88 *Samba*: Certificate 15 118m 43s;  
**April** p.79 *The Little Death* (aka *A Funny Kind of Love*): Certificate 18 96m 10s

## RED RIVER



The gunshot that interrupts John Wayne's murderous assault at the close of Howard Hawks's film is an underrated master stroke

By Farran Smith Nehme

At sun-up in a dusty street in Abilene, Kansas, in 1865, a towering figure of a man is striding toward a showdown, as a herd of cattle moves aside like courtiers making way for their king. A cowboy calls to the old-timer, then puts a bullet in his side to get his attention. The man turns, drops the cowboy with one shot, and walks on.

There stands a handsome stripling some 15 or 20 years his junior. The big man barks, "Draw." The youngster maintains eye contact, but won't do it. The older man fires off warning shots, one so close it cuts a groove in the young man's cheek. Finally the big guy grabs the youngster's gun, flings it away and begins to beat the kid with one hand. Even then his opponent won't retaliate—until the big man is slightly off guard, and the youngster seizes the chance to knock him flat. Now both throw punch after punch, until they collide with a chuck wagon.

And then, a gunshot. The men separate. A woman appears, gun trained, and gives the dazed combatants a large, and only intermittently coherent, piece of her mind. Why are they doing this, she rages, when they love each other? She stomps away, and the two men end up grinning at each other, their blood feud mended in the space of time it took her to yell at them.

The big man is Tom Dunson (John Wayne), the cowboy is Cherry Valance (John Ireland), the youngster is Matthew Garth (Montgomery Clift), and the ranting woman is Tess Millay (Joanne Dru). The film, of course, is Howard Hawks's

*Red River* (1947), a tale of how Dunson drives 9,000 head of cattle and a motley assortment of cowboys across hundreds of miles to find a market for the beef. But Dunson's ambition becomes monomaniacal, he grows violent to keep order, and eventually Matt, the surrogate son Dunson adopted as a boy, seizes the herd and leaves Dunson behind. Dunson takes that about as well as you'd expect: "Every time you turn around, expect to see me. 'Cause one time you'll turn around and I'll be there. I'll kill ya, Matt."

*Red River* may have the most widely disliked ending of any major canonical film. Roger Ebert spoke for many when he called it "silly". Co-writer Borden Chase's original story had Dunson dying in grandly symbolic fashion after crossing the Red River, with Matt and Tess, one last time. Hawks's version was "garbage", said Chase. Clift complained that Dru's intervention made things "a farce". Even Hawks, while defending the ending to Peter Bogdanovich years later, called it "corny".

Do I agree? I do not. I love it. Where others see a crude *deus ex damine*, I see a woman restoring order. After all, Dunson should have taken a woman's advice from the beginning.

Rewind to the opening, as Dunson leaves his fiancée Fen (Coleen Gray) behind, though she tells him prophetically, "You need what a woman can give you, to do what you have to do." She's killed in a Comanche raid. Aside from Tess—who's in love with Matt, and has heard both him and Dunson admit they love each other—only sidekick Nadine Groot (Walter

Brennan) understands father and son. And during that last brawl, after Matt lands his first blow, Groot exclaims, "It's all right. For 14 years, I've been scared, but it's gonna be all right."

The fight is the culmination of a stupendous tonal high-wire act from Hawks. There is near-constant loss and violence in this film. But when it's over, just as the mood begins to dissipate, Hawks undercuts it—with a look, a line, a reaction shot of Brennan.

When the boy Matt is first discovered, raving after escaping a Comanche raid, Dunson lets fly with a slap to bring him out of it. Almost immediately they shift to banter about the kid refusing to give up his gun, lines echoed at the climax; and, like the fadeout, the scene ends with grins. Throughout *Red River*, serious things happen while people crack wise. Dunson brands cattle that aren't his, a hanging offence; Matt remarks, "You're gonna wind up branding every rump in the state of Texas except mine." After Dunson shoots deserters from the drive, men drift away, shaken. Then cowboy Simms Reeves (Hank Worden) speaks up: "Plantin' and readin', plantin' and readin'. Fill a man full of lead and stick him in the ground and then read words at him. Why, when you killed a man, why try to read the Lord in as a partner on the job?"

Dunson, admittedly, is as grim a character as Wayne ever played, aside from Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (1956). Dunson's change of heart in *Red River* mirrors Ethan's decision not to kill Debbie at the end of John Ford's film. But like everything else in Hawks, this life-and-death turnabout is played as practical sense, not poetic mystery. *Red River*'s conclusion is carefully set up, but this is also true, and not trivial: flawed, obsessive Dunson is a great character, and so is Matt. Hawks knew audiences wouldn't want either man to die. He felt that way himself, and he was right. **S**

*'Red River' may have the most disliked ending of any major canonical film. Do I agree? I do not. I love it*



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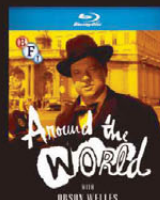
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